

IDENTITY AND INTERSECTIONALITY:
THE CRITICAL AUTOETHNOGRAPHY OF A “TRANSPLANT” TEACHER IN HAWAI‘I

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Dedication

To Uncle Danny. Rest in peace.

To my family. I firmly believe that all people do the best they can with what they have.

The wound is where the light enters you.

-Rumi

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Abstract

Teacher identity has emerged as a topic amongst contemporary researchers to inform, impact, and reform professional practice in light of the unique challenges presented within education in the United States. A homogeneous teaching population, which remains overwhelmingly White and middle class, must address a demographic and cultural divide amongst students, teachers, families, as well as in curriculum and instruction. Bartolome (2004, 2008) argues that teachers must have an understanding of how their ideological orientation shapes their views of students and influences their teaching. Through this praxis, I critically explored the historically constituted subjectivities, cultural meanings, social dynamics, and discourses that shaped my teaching identity as a haole (White) transplant (cultural outsider) teacher who moved to Hawai‘i. I used autoethnographic methodology as a form of narrative writing to invite readers into my cultural experiences. This opened up a space to explore the impact of the social, cultural, historical, and political forces in Hawai‘i on my personal, professional, and situational dimensions, which constituted my teacher identity. The results indicated that I am affected by the multiple identities that I have employed to navigate educational and personal spaces. The findings revealed six major themes: (i) understanding the complexities of identity are a prerequisite for critical consciousness; (ii) being a critically conscious teacher is a habit of mind, whereas being a culturally responsive teacher is the action resulting from that mindset; (iii) lived experience plays a role in enabling an understanding of one’s cultural position; (iv) critical consciousness is an iterative, ongoing process; (v) teaching for social justice needs to be approached both theoretically and practically; and (vi) autoethnography is a relevant tool to excavate one’s identity and can reframe educators’ thinking and subsequent actions in the classroom. The study provides a framework to address the need for theoretical and methodological transparency that is vital for exploring teacher identity.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

“We tell ourselves stories in order to live.”

Author Joan Didion (1979, p. 11) famously wrote the above words in *The White Album*. Narrative imagining – story – is a deeply human activity. Our lives are shaped by the stories woven through our experiences; we tell ourselves stories so that we may understand who we are and how we fit into a complex world (Ellis, 2004). In this sense, narrative is fundamental to being human. The stories we tell ourselves in order to live bring together diverse elements into an integrated whole; stories are the structure for organizing our knowledge and experience (Bruner, 1984). The resulting narrative framework confers upon our lives a sense of inner sameness and social continuity. Thus, our stories play a primary role in the construction and maintenance of self-identity. As the story evolves and identity takes form, we come to *live* the story as we *write* it, assimilating our daily experience to a schema of self that is a product of that experience (Goodson, 1992).

“We tell ourselves stories in order to live” Didion (1979) argued. Then she went on to describe a time in her life when the stories she told herself started to fail.

We look for the sermon in the suicide, for the social or moral lesson in the murder of five. We interpret what we see, select the most workable of the multiple choices. We live entirely... by the imposition of a narrative line upon disparate images, by the ‘ideas’ with which we have learned to freeze the shifting phantasmagoria

which is our actual experience. Or at least we do for a while. (p.

11)

“For a while” is a phrase worth contemplating. Didion refers to how, given the myriad of transformative historical events of the American 1960’s, suddenly the script that she knew, the she was meant to follow, no longer made any sense. Didion began to realize that much of what she had come to believe to be real, true, and good about life on earth did not and could not help her understand the nature of things *now*. As an ontologist, epistemologist, and moral philosopher, she was unable to answer the fundamental questions of ultimate concern.

Didion’s choice of words is significant because it sheds light on the symbiotic relationship between humans and stories. She does not say that we *make up* stories in order to live. The stories are somehow already there, waiting to be told. We are born into stories that we depend on for our identities and that depend on us to perpetuate them; we are both informed by story and formed by story. Thus, if identity is constructed through narrative understanding, then narrative also becomes a form of identity in which the things someone chooses to include in their story, and the way he or she tells it, can both reflect and shape who he or she is. Frank (2010) puts it best, explaining that “Stories work with people, for people, and always stories work on people, affecting what people are able to see as real, as possible, and as worth doing or best avoided” (p. 3). After stories animate, they instigate.

We should interrogate these stories. We should ask why these stories work and for whom, as well as why and how these stories fail to work. We should identify the narrators of these stories and investigate why they seek to legitimize a specific form of knowledge over other available choices. We must be aware that our stories are not our birthrights. We should be alarmed that logic and sensibility matter more than validity and objectivism.

But more often than not, we do not.

The stories we tell ourselves allow us to rationalize our experiences, but more importantly they place us in the position of the narrator – the position of power. In taking charge of our own narratives, we ‘get’ to define what our past means, we ‘get’ to decide the roles we play in our stories, and by that, we ‘get’ to reject the imposition of other interpretations of our own experiences onto ourselves. In other words, we assume a superior sense of personal agency. So deeply part of our collective consciousness, our stories assume the force of truth. We lose awareness of them as the social and linguistic constructions that they are. We do not have to fact check our stories, but they do have to feel authentic to our experience. Florio-Ruane (2001) highlights that “...a good portion of our education as teachers takes place within the inheritance of such stories, at least until they either fail us or we are invited to stand outside them and consider them critically [Gee, 1989]” (p. 41).

Overview

The research I undertook for this dissertation reflects both of Florio-Ruane’s (2001) notions: a time when my stories failed me, it was also an opportunity for me to stand outside of the narrative and consider them critically. Written as a series of autoethnographic stories and reflections, this research represents a highly personalized account of my teaching identity. Autoethnography, according to Reed-Danahay (1997), is “a form of self-narrative that places the self within a social context. It is both a method and a text” (p. 6). As a research methodology, autoethnography engages the individual in cultural analysis and interpretation (Chang, 2008). Autoethnographers “reflexively explore their personal experiences and their interactions with others as a way of achieving wider cultural, political or social understanding” (Pace, 2012, p. 2). Starr (2010) notes that autoethnography draws on the concept of *conscientization* (Freire, 1971),

which involves the individual “becoming aware of one’s position and creating a space to change the perception of the resultant reality” (p. 1). Engaging in the autoethnographic process of self-exploration and interrogation aids individuals in locating themselves within their own history and culture, allowing them to broaden their understanding of their own values in relation to others. Intense reflexivity and introspection undergird this study of self as participant, going beyond recounting facts as objectively as possible, as occurs with autobiography, to acknowledging that the researcher is interpreting the facts through cultural perspectives “formed through years of sociocultural, socio-historical, socio-political, and socioeconomic events and circumstances” (Tilley-Lubbs, 2016, p. 3),

In sum, autoethnography is a product of three spaces: a subjective inward dimension (*auto* = self; personal experience), an objective outward dimension (*ethno* = sociocultural; cultural experience), and a narrative dimension (*graphy* = the research process; to write or describe) which focuses on storytelling as a means of knowing the self and the world (Ellis, 2004, Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). As a methodology, autoethnography “acknowledges and accommodates subjectivity, emotionality, and the researcher’s influence on research, rather than hiding from these matters or assuming they don’t exist” (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011, p. 275). This dissertation articulates the process I followed in constructing my identity as a critically conscious educator and describes the changes that have occurred in my practices as a result of my identity. That is, this research is about a journey of change in instruction fostered by a change of identity as a White social studies teacher in Hawai‘i. Autoethnographic inquiry has served as a catalytic force, helping me to reveal my reflective journey of transformation from validator to facilitator. Within this dissertation, I

provide a personalized account of the triumphs, disappointments, periods of vulnerability, and the challenges associated with engaging in critically reflective practice.

Background: (*The Stories I Inherited*)

This research project can be traced far beyond the initiation of my doctoral studies. At no point in my adolescence did I possess even the slightest desire to become an educator. It was not that I felt any significant aversion to the profession itself; I actually admired many of the teachers whom I encountered during my upbringing. Further, I viewed a number of the teachers who dually served as my athletic coaches as role models. No, I had nothing against teachers or teaching. I just saw myself as not being cut out for that type of work.

Formal schooling represented a struggle. I can vividly recall how my adolescent passion for both reading and all things historical seemed to have little relevance to the activities that characterized my social studies courses. More often than not, historical content was presented in an encyclopedic fashion, which in turn made the information conferred seem indisputable in nature. I did not excel within the banking model of education, assuming the role of “passive receiver” of information. In this context, all content appeared to be equal in value. I had a difficult time determining what was relevant and what was irrelevant.

During parent-teacher conferences I was often characterized in a negative light, as deficient. Report cards from this time-period are marked by descriptors such as *unmotivated*, *forgetful*, and *unprepared*. The subpar grades printed next to these words validated their very presence. This perplexed my parents: I had little, if any, disciplinary issues while in school. Clearly, they postulated, the problem had be located in a lack of effort and focus. These were things that I could control, they assumed. These were *choices*. As an adolescent, I did not possess the maturity nor the capability to distinguish a difference between acts of negative reinforcement

and those of punishment. As far as I was concerned, I was just a lousy son. In their defense, my parents were only attempting to rid me of what they believed were poor habits. I was never directly punished for a lack of ability. Back then - and through most of my adult life - I did not understand what terms such as “cognitive dissonance” or “emotional manipulation” meant. Nor did I understand the nature or impact of personality disorders. As far as I was concerned, my parents represented nothing less than heroes. They expected more from me than most other families from our working class town did of their children. They proved time and time again that they would make any sacrifice necessary to support me. They were adults. They told me who I was and I believed them. I “ruined every vacation that we ever went on” and “had anger problems”. I was “selfish” and “incapable of caring for myself or others”. I was “a loser”.

These words hurt. But they were just tough love, I assumed. Or was I told that? I cannot remember.

Reflection upon this period of my life has brought to light a common theme amongst the activities that I enjoyed most during these formative years: they were accepted without judgment and/or lacked any type of external pressure. In other words, participating in these activities rendered me incapable of experiencing failure. Although I excelled in competitive sports, they collectively represented opportunities to either succeed or fail. I played two varsity sports in high school and eventually became a college athlete. It did not matter; these were a means to be identified in a positive light: dedicated, committed, hardworking, tough, and capable. I craved these labels. I was supposed to embody such qualities, but had failed to do so in the classroom. Athletics served a vehicle for me to prove my worth. I preferred to be in the ocean, far beyond the reach of expectations. The surf-zone became a “third space” of sorts; a location and community where I could search for my authentic self.

Surfing represented far more than a hobby. In turn, what is not a hobby cannot be identified as an activity or sport. As many surfers have argued, labeling surfing in this manner is to marginalize it; undermining its powerful spiritual capacity. The contradicting feelings of awe, respect, fear, gratitude, terror, and love that I experienced while surfing were unlike anything I knew outside of its realm. A sense of humility and personal empowerment developed out my oceanic experiences; both surrendering to and surviving/harnessing the waves it produced. John Bowker (2000) points out, “A strange thing about religion is that we all know what it is until someone asks us to tell them” (p. xv). Many in society conflate spirituality with religion, as evidenced by various definitions of spirituality which fail to explain the concept, instead describing what it is presumably not: of material nature, temporal, or of worldly things. Life, I observed, was a lot like surfing. When caught in the impact zone, it is crucial to keep pushing forward because you never know what is over the next wave. The ocean does not allow one to simply give up and walk away. To submit to its power could very well be the difference between survival and death. In a sense, the fundamental act of surfing is to overcome constant rejection; paddling out through crashing waves which whisper ‘No! Go back to the beach! This is not where you are supposed to be!’ I learned to trust myself – my reasoning, logic, and abilities - through overcoming such difficulty. I am reminded of the wise words of an American professional surfer, Liard Hamilton, who stated, “Make sure your worst enemy doesn’t live between your own two ears”. Surfing provided a counter narrative to that which I had internalized over the course of my upbringing.

Despite a lack of success in academic settings, my parents pushed me to attend college upon graduating high school with the belief that I would soon mature and turn my life around. Yet mid-way through my undergraduate college experience, I was still alarmingly similar to the

young man who had disappointed himself and his family time and time again. When the time to choose a major had arrived, my mother encouraged me to enter the field of education. Teaching was a ‘noble calling’, she argued. I had unconsciously lost trust in my own ability to make quality decisions at this point in my life. Unaware, I assumed that I was just indecisive in nature. After all, I had read that Libra’s were supposed to be indecisive. Although they appear to be similar, there exists a difference between indecisiveness and irresoluteness. Being indecisive can be understood as being ‘open’, one is not yet settled or determined. On the other hand, to be irresolute is to be *unsure* about how to act. Although both terms involve the act of being undecided, I position indecisiveness above irresoluteness in that it appears more active, assertive, and engaged than the latter. During the time period described, I conflated these two constructs within my stories.

I listened to the stories of others. Lacking the possession of a true sense of a core identity, internal feelings of deep shame and guilt guided my behaviors and actions. Today, I am well-aware that I had internalized a negative self-image of one who was selfish, lazy, and undeserving. My mother had entered the workforce as an educational assistant for special needs students in order to help me pay the increased college tuition resulting from the academic scholarship I had lost due to subpar academic performance. Shortly thereafter she was severely injured by a student. After multiple operations were deemed unsuccessful, it became apparent that she would no longer be mobile or pain-free as she once had been. I blamed myself for her injury; I needed to make her sacrifice meaningful. A fire ignited inside me. I spent my final three years in college working day and night to earn my undergraduate and graduate degrees in the field of history education. I managed to attain the first 4.0 GPA of my adult life during this time period and believed that perhaps I had finally grown up into the man that I was supposed to be.

Yet those feelings of uncertainty would haunt me as I progressed through my career as an educator.

Motivations (*My Stories Begin to Fail*)

The more immediate seeds of this inquiry were planted shortly before I moved to Hawai'i from the East Coast of the United States in July of 2009, shortly after completing my first year of teaching social studies courses at a public high school located in an affluent New Jersey suburb. Having just graduated college with a Master's Degree in Education the year before, the only authentic teaching experience I possessed at the time of my hiring for this job was an awkward and uncomfortable semester spent student teaching the previous year. My positionality as a novice teacher tasked with a significant and diverse course load – from instructing Advanced Placement classes to university-bound upper-classmen to working in a remedial fashion with freshmen - resulted in limited time for any meaningful acts of self-reflection during that initial year of teaching. I could have been a poster-boy for the population conception of first-year teachers as merely trying to 'stay afloat'.

Upon the culmination of the school year, I looked forward solely to a summer break spent soaking up the sun through my long-standing position serving as an ocean lifeguard at the local beach. Sitting upon my perch atop the lifeguard stand that summer, I scanned the Atlantic Ocean for hours on end, admiring its unceasing inability to be *perpetual*. The ocean's multiplicity of identities became apparent with each passing day, the result of external factors such as wind direction and speed, offshore storms and hurricanes, and the weather patterns in general. In turn, weather patterns are significantly impacted by larger forces such as seasons and human activities which contribute to climate change. While I possessed little, if any, control over the ocean, I observed that I did have the ability to improve my own 'waterman' skills in relation to it. Such

thinking spurred self-reflection regarding my own identity: since attaining a teaching position, I had been increasingly labeled as just that by family, friends, and colleagues. I was no longer ‘Nick’, but instead ‘social studies teacher at Manalapan High School’. Although I observed that my family and friends seemed to be incredibly proud of this new identity, I had yet to make sense of it.

Reflecting upon my first year as a social studies teacher in a New Jersey public high school, I discovered many similarities to my observations about the ocean. That is, I became acutely aware that I was also heavily influenced by external factors that seemed to be out of my control. My interactions with other faculty, members of the school administration, my family, as well as parents and community stakeholders had shaped my perceptions of what it meant to be a ‘good’ teacher, what constituted ‘good’ learning, etc. Collectively, these external forces came together to shape a culture of fear that governed my motivations, perceptions, beliefs, values, and actions. The locus of my intentions during that first year of teaching was centered upon meeting both the direct and perceived demands of this system in order to ensure that I met the overarching goal of maintaining gainful employment. This learned value falls in line with the American dominant, middle class cultural model of success, characterized Gee (1997) as individual effort, hard work, and pursuit of advancement at the expense of personal relationships. The demands proved diverse in nature. Direct demands generally came from my superiors. These included aligning course content with state standards, assessing students in a manner deemed appropriate as per school district policies, and even ensuring that my final grades for each class resembled a ‘rainbow’. The ‘rainbow’, as described by a direct supervisor, represented a perfect bell-curve of grades – “not too many *A*’s and not too many *F*’s”. With the desired outcome seemingly predetermined, I altered my professional praxis to fit into what was deemed

acceptable. The indirect demands proved to be exceptionally more difficult to meet due to the ambiguity surrounding many of them. Some were simple in nature, such as wearing a dress shirt and tie to work each day - even on casual Fridays when more established faculty members wore jeans and polo shirts. Others, though, contradicted my own beliefs and values. If a classroom became too noisy, I could count on a visit from a superior. In this regard, quality teaching meant keeping my classes quiet at all times. This demonstrated to other faculty and administration members that I was firmly in control. Silence, as I understood it, was an indication of strong classroom management practices.

That familiar feeling of being *lost* was present once again. I felt as if I was being squeezed into a one-size-fits-all box. I was not growing, and further, did not want to live in a state of fear any longer. During the middle of that summer, I made a decision to resign from my secure and well-compensated teaching position and subsequently moved to Hawai'i to pursue a graduate degree in the field of counseling psychology. Implicitly, I was also searching for a new perspective regarding the cultural and institutional pressures I faced in New Jersey. I had no job prospects, no support system, and no knowledge of the culture I would be entering. What I did know was that there were superior surfing opportunities in Hawai'i as well as a graduate program in the field of counseling psychology to which I had been accepted. Helping others with their problems represented a personal desire that was not met while teaching in New Jersey. As a faculty, I observed that we seemed to cause more problems for our students than we helped to solve. I had located enough of my core self to make my own decision.

Unbeknownst to me at the time, this move would also signal the beginning of a life-altering journey of personal and professional growth. Initially, I was perplexed as to why some individuals seemingly adapted very well to the local culture of Hawai'i while others appeared to

encounter much difficulty assimilating. I vividly recall feelings of confusion and puzzlement – but not *awe* - as I experienced new things on a daily basis. *Awe* would have suggested a sense of reverence; a conscious acknowledgment of a certain authority or sacredness. My attitude at the time was quite the opposite; I had internally cultivated a rejection of my new environment due to my perception of a multitude of cultural differences, which led me to believe that various aspects of this state were inferior to where I had come from. In this sense, I was a *cultural outsider*. Over time and through experience and observation, I would come to understand that there was much to discover about being a teacher by experiencing being a cultural stranger.

Bakhtin (1986) explains, “In the realm of culture, *outsiderness* is a most powerful factor in understanding” (p. 7). A number of years spent living in Hawai‘i while teaching within various public, private, and charter school settings led to the cultivation of a heightened sense of self-awareness of the cultural tension that existed between what I had acquired ideologically from my sociocultural upbringing and the new culture within which I found myself embedded. My beliefs, values, and perceptions were challenged on a regular basis in both personal and professional settings. To this very day, at times I feel as though, even when I know I am right, I am still wrong. Through these powerful experiences, I was forced to leave my comfort zone and began to understand exclusion, discrimination, and what it felt like to be the ‘Other’ for the first time in my life. Romano (2014) explains, “It is when we come to experiences where others do not understand embedded assumptions that we come to recognize our identity” (p. 73). Romano expands on the transformative impact of cultural outsiderness on educators, asserting:

But when a teacher has an overseas teaching experience... the tables are turned. The teacher becomes the stranger in a foreign landscape, even though schools are identifiable and similar in

characteristics. It is the teacher who must incline her head, raise the questions, and seek answers within a foreign culture. It is the teacher who must make sense of students, for it is the students who have the collective cultural capital that the teacher, this stranger, lacks. (p. 70)

Although the author intends to refer to teaching in another country, the sentiment proves similar to my own lived experiences. Cultural capital can be understood as general cultural background, knowledge, dispositions, and skills that are passed on from one generation to another. McLaren (2002) adds “Cultural capital represents ways of talking, acting, modes of style, moving, socializing, forms of knowledge, language practices, and values” (p. 93). Through experiencing cultural tensions, I came to acknowledge my own ‘lack’, subsequently learning to listen and look with a certain ‘wide-awakeness’ that recognizes both cultures.

Summary of Overview, Background, and Motivations

This dissertation details my personal journey towards the development of *wide-awakeness*, which Greene (1995) describes as an “awareness of what it is to be in the world” (p. 35). Upon moving across the country - from the fast-paced, highly competitive and individualistic culture of the northeastern United States to the community-oriented, family-centered focus of Hawai‘i an society - the stories I told myself in order to live had gradually began to fail. As a transplant, I was immediately positioned as a stranger in a foreign landscape. Freire (1998) explains, “It is in experiencing differences that we discover ourselves as I’s and you’s” (p. 71). To attain such a perspective, I had to acknowledge my own ‘lack’ of the dominant cultural capital held by my students. That is, the teacher positioned as a cultural outsider becomes aware not only of his or her students but also of his or her own differences – a role-

reversal within the traditional ‘self-Other’ consciousness. As Romano (2014) points out, “The experience of awareness of oneself and one’s culture can foster a more critical way of looking at schools, at students, and at what it means to teach” (p. 70). My positionality as an “outsider” in Hawai’i would serve time and time again to spur such awareness.

Recognizing the problematic assumption that ‘knowledge’, as it has been officially recognized in colleges, universities and the public education system, as a social *good* represents far more than a decision to learn something new or attain an additional perspective. The attainment of such a consciousness requires the participant to move well beyond traditional notions of “competency” (i.e., knowledge, skills, and attitudes). The examination, reflection, and action process of attending to who we are, privileged and oppressed, in light of social, political, cultural, and historical forces is a complex task. Further, the critical questioning of life experience and personal beliefs is a difficult and threatening process for anyone, but especially for those with a mainstream background because the process frequently generates challenges to our most cherished cultural beliefs. In this light, my autoethnographic journey serves as means of releasing self from the comforting captivity of sociocultural experience; the process of examining formerly unconscious assumptions represents an arduous path leading into unfamiliar territory.

Greene’s (1995) notion of “wide-awakeness” represents the foundation upon which Freire’s (2002) notion of “critical consciousness” emerges. Freire conceptualizes critical consciousness as “learning to perceive social, political, and economic status contradictions and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality” (p. 17). This language suggests that critical consciousness is ongoing process of questioning, reflecting, voicing and taking action. According to Nieto and McDonough (2011), critical consciousness involves “critiquing relations

of power, questioning one's assumptions about reality, and reflecting on the complexities of multiple identities [Freire, 1973; Nieto et al., 2008]" (p. 366). Freire (1998) deems the construct "an unfinished requirement of the human condition...as a road we have to follow to deepen our awareness of the world, of facts, of events, of the demands of human consciousness to develop our capacity for epistemological curiosity" (p. 55). It is an "awareness that your own ideas come from a particular set of life experiences," as well as, "accepting that ideas about what is normal, or right, or good, are products of life experience rather than universal laws" (Hinchey, 2006, p. 25).

A critical consciousness is more than the possession of a particular critical awareness. It is the disposition to continuously engage in the ongoing cycle of praxis from which critical awareness emerges. This position assumes that beliefs, values and perspectives do not exist in a vacuum but in mutual re-informing reciprocity between consciousness and practice. As Greene (2005) articulates, educators are entrusted with a consequential task:

The... educator must be awake, critical, open to the world.

It is an honor and a responsibility to be a teacher in such
dark times—and to imagine, and to act on what we
imagine, what we believe ought to at last be. (p. 80)

Indeed, the experience of *awareness* itself - of oneself and one's culture - fostered within me a critical way of looking at schools, at students, at what it means to teach, and most importantly, at myself.

Statement of the Research Problem

Overview

Here, I outline the dilemma this research project is attempting to address through a political lens. I begin by broadly contextualizing U.S. education and educational reform, in particular the impacts of deprofessionalization within the context of neoliberalism and educational reform, on students and teachers alike. I then move to a brief exploration of the work of educators that strive to infuse a philosophy of equity and social transformation before concluding with a look at how one potential solution, the development of critical consciousness among teachers, is constructed in the teacher education literature. Next, I consider models of critical reflection, predicated on supporting students or the “Other” The educator’s engagement with models of critical reflection can help them achieve this, for the purpose of exploring the complexity of their own identity. The investigative lens is then shifted inward as I engage with a narrow perspective reflecting the specific context of the problem as I have experienced it. I describe how Hawai‘i’s colonial past and current ethnic/racial dynamics present unique challenges to the process of teacher identity formation.

Introduction

Teacher identity has emerged as a topic of discussion amongst contemporary researchers in the effort to enlighten, impact, and reform professional practice in light of the unique challenges presented within the complex context of 21st century education in the United States. In his monograph *We Can’t Teach What We Don’t Know* (2006), Gary Howard boldly asserts:

We are living in a dangerous, confused, and troubled world—a world that needs leaders, educators, and classroom teachers who can bridge impermeable cultural, ethnic, and religious borders, envision new possibilities,

and engage in personal transformation and visionary action

(p. xi).

Through his quote, Howard alludes to the implications of the unprecedented racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, religious, and linguistic heterogeneity of America's current student population for schools and, more importantly, classroom teachers. The public school student population in the United States is projected to increase in diversity. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) predicts that White students, who in 1970 represented 79 percent of the public school student population (Neito & McDonough, 2011), will represent only 46 percent of public school students in 2024, a drop from 51 percent of the student population in 2012 (U.S. Department of Education, 2016, p. 4). This cultural mosaic within U.S. classrooms has spurred a growing challenge to meeting the needs of these students. While the demographics of the nation's student population have changed considerably, however, the same is not true of the teacher population. In the 2011–12 school year, 82 percent of public school teachers were White (U.S. Department of Education, 2016, p. 5).

In sum, an increasingly homogeneous teaching population, which remains overwhelmingly White and middle class, must address a demographic and cultural divide amongst students, teachers, families, as well as curriculum and instruction (Gay & Howard, 2001) resulting from the exceptional pluralism of America's current student population. Concurrently, teachers must function within the context of an educational climate characterized by increased standardization and accountability measures which emphasize a gridlock of planning, design, implementation, and evaluation in education. These measures are a means of providing educational equity in an effort to bridge the achievement gap among racial, cultural, and linguistic groups and their White, middle-class counterparts (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Sleeter

& Stillman, 2005). As such, teachers' time is too often taken up with preparing students for such measures. Clearly, our schools do not adequately meet the challenge faced by the increasing diversity of the student population. This is reason enough to analyze what can be done to prepare teachers and other educators to be successful with students of diverse backgrounds. Nieto and McDonough (2011) sum the problem up in general terms, explaining "Given the tremendous racial and ethnic imbalance between students in K– 12 schools and their teachers, it is evident that most teachers will need appropriate education and training to work effectively with students who are different from them" (p. 365).

Freire (1995) purposefully states, "We cannot teach what we do not know" (p. 89). It is essential that teachers understand their cultural position with regard to such factors as race, ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status, and language, as well as the ways in which these factors can directly shape one's perceptions, which then shape one's ideologies and which can have a tremendous bearing on the educational outcomes of all students. Gay and Kirkland (2003) put forward that such knowledge and understanding are just as, or arguably - even more important than a teacher's mastery of techniques for instructional effectiveness. Teachers must have a deep understanding of their own identities (both individual and collective) and the ways in which such identities work to shape their perceptions and ideologies *before* they can become effective teachers of students in both suburban and urban schools (Kailin, 1999, 2002). Romano (2008) explains, "If a teacher does not reflect on [or is not even aware of] the impact of culture upon his or her identity, the ramifications for students are immense" (p. 88). For a teacher, identity motivates and colors the social dynamics of teaching, as well as the pedagogical approaches used to teach. Teachers' perceptions and ideologies with regard to race and culture

play a pivotal role in not only their classroom practices and subsequently the academic achievement of students, but in the everyday schooling experiences of their students.

Identity is an individual's conception of the self. It is a response to the question: "Who am I?" The answer to this question is complicated. Every individual possesses multitudes of different identities, some of which may conflict with each other. This is because every identity is fundamentally linked to a social group, which ties people together with a certain set of values and norms (Stets & Burke, 2000). An identity emerges out of one's cultural upbringing and is subsequently carried throughout our lives. Lynch and Hanson (1998) describe *culture* as the framework that guides and bounds life practices. People do not biologically inherit a culture; instead, they learn it. Lipsey (2013) asserts "Who we are, or rather—who we *think* we are, is based on the intersectionalities of our history, experiences, interpretations, perceptions, and interactions" (p. 13). From our lived-experiences come our identities, out of which emerge our ideologies, which permeate homes, schools, churches, social circles, and other institutions on a continuous basis. When ideologies are not critically examined, they have the ability to mask themselves under the guise of neutrality, fact, and truth.

Freire (1998) views teachers as 'cultural workers', carrying with them the cultural capital of their identity and using this cultural capital in order to teach students. Romano (2014) describes cultural identity as "a process where we are rewarded for convergent behaviors that fit into the forms of our associated living and met with resistance when we behave outside of those norms" (p. 69). In theory, schools are supposed to be great equalizers of inequality. In reality, schools are places where cultural norms are constantly at play. That is, when a student fits well into the norms – the expectations and routines of schooling – the student is praised and acknowledged. For those students from different ethnic or sociocultural backgrounds who

possess little or none of the cultural capital of the dominant group, school can be a site where they are discouraged and devalued (Romano, 2014). Talbert-Johnson (2006) contends:

Because teachers bring to schools their own set of cultural and personal characteristics that influence their work, it is not surprising that their beliefs, dispositions, behaviors, and experiences would also be included. The reality is that when teachers and students are out of sync, the inevitable occurs: miscommunication and confrontation between the student, the teacher, and the home; hostility; alienation; diminished self-esteem; and eventually school failure. (p. 153)

Unfortunately, students of diverse backgrounds all too often must learn to fit in and be recognized by the teacher or risk becoming marginalized in school.

Teachers from mainstream sociocultural backgrounds are less apt to notice this sacrifice of their students, and even if they do, it is likely they believe they are helping the student, even while they are imposing their cultural construction upon the student (Romano, 2014). According to Shannon (1992; as cited in Degener, 2001, p. 31), all of the decisions that educators make regarding program and lesson goals, the materials to be used, and the nature of teacher interaction with students “are actually negotiations over whose values, interests, and beliefs will be validated at school” (p. 2). Students of ethnic, racialized, or low income backgrounds are forced to learn discrete knowledge that has little relevance for them, and which, in fact, ignores their cultures and contributions. Romano (2014) sums it up best, asserting that for some young

people, “school lessons are to give up who they are and become enculturated to the ways of the school” (p. 69).

In order for teachers to be effective in such a climate of layered and complex diversity, they must become reflexive educators capable of questioning their own attitudes, thought process, values, assumptions, prejudices and habitual actions and subsequently assessing their impact on their lives and their views of the world (Banks, 2001; Starr, 2010). In light of the represented multiplicity of difference in American classrooms, Britzman (1991; as cited in Starr, 2010, p. 1) described the process of becoming a teacher as one of biographical crisis, involving more than “applying decontextualized skills or of mirroring predetermined images; it is a time when one's past, present and future are set in dynamic tension” (p. 31). Such a conflict requires that educators adopt a critical position towards the social relations created within difference. Understanding one's identity proves integral for adopting such a critical position. Starr (2010) explains

Through the interrogation of one's identity and the locations and interactions pivotal in the formation of identity, the result is increased consciousness and “conscientising of social positioning” [Hickey & Austin, 2007, p. 24]. This awareness makes teachers better equipped to help students become “thoughtful, caring and reflective in a multicultural world society” [Banks, 2001, p. 5]. (p. 1)

The current situation requires teachers who are deeply sensitive to the sociopolitical and economic environment in which we are educating our children (Gay & Kirkland, 2003). That is,

educators must develop a critical consciousness – a multifaceted concept described as a tool, framework, state of mind, journey, an awakening, and a continuum in the research literature. (Gatimu, 2009). As I use it here, critical consciousness represents the capacity to recognize and understand one's circumstances in light of the power and social structures that constrain them (Freire, 1970). As a key element of Freire's (1970) notion of 'praxis', critical consciousness involves cycles of reflection and action. Praxis, through a Freirean lens, represents an ongoing process enabling the intersection of theory and practice which acts as a site of social transformation through the emergence of informed conscientization and committed action toward humanity and the world (Freire, 2000). The effective engagement in praxis, in turn, is predicated upon the educators' possession of agency, a construct which Alexander (2005) conceptualizes as the embodiment of human self-entitlement to values, beliefs, actions, and choices. Agency, which is positioned as an antecedent to praxis, can be achieved through understanding the complexities of identity and subsequently, learning to challenge racism. Agency, praxis, and critical consciousness are embodied within the autoethnographic approach to understanding identity; that is, the process of autoethnography is in itself an ongoing cycle of critical reflection, the integration of theory, and action.

Political Context of the Problem

Henry Giroux (2010) posits:

The fundamental tasks of educators is to make sure that the future points the way to a more socially just world, a world in which critique and possibility—in conjunction with the values of reason, freedom and equality—function to alter the grounds upon which life is lived. (p. 3)

Giroux echoes the growing sentiment of the social justice scholars who lead the push in contemporary education to incorporate curriculum and pedagogy that is more inclusive, diverse, and representative of the various perspectives associated with the growing pluralism of America's student population in the attempt to honor students' social and cultural realities. However, the hierarchical structures in society continue to influence education through a focus on teacher competency, standards of accreditation, and performativity that privileges knowledge and skill acquisition reflecting the values of the dominant, Eurocentric cultural paradigm over educational responses to issues of equity and social justice (Kelchtermans, 2005; Sleeter, 2008; Zeichner, 2010). Social studies educators' differences can be described along a continuum with polar purposes of "indoctrination" – i.e. implementing a set of activities predetermined by policy makers, textbook authors, and high-stakes tests - and "critical thought" – i.e. an examination of the intersection of language, social relations, and practice for the purpose of cultivating a personally meaningful understanding of the way the world is and how one might act to transform that world (Ross & Marker, 2005).

Educators find themselves positioned squarely at the intersection of a disagreement about the fundamental relationship between education and society: *should schools cater to the status quo or transform it* (Parker, 2010)? The term 'transform' refers to approaches to education that are critical of the dominant social order and motivated by a desire to cultivate both political and economic democracy (Stanley, 2005). Its roots firmly planted in the effort to incorporate both academic history and citizenship education into the curriculum, the social studies curriculum can most adequately be described as an "ideological battleground" (Ross, 2006) that is characterized by the ongoing debate pertaining to its nature, purpose, and content.

In response to multiple calls to examine the school curriculum as one derived by dominant and oppressive ideologies in the name of the nation state and ultimately as a tool for cultural hegemony, the traditional notion of assimilation has gradually lost traction within schools, giving way to a postmodern paradigm of “critical pedagogy” that accentuates interrelatedness across the divides of age, gender, and culture as part of a new and necessary consciousness (Apple, 1979, 2004; Bowers, 1993) “reflecting a socially constructed reality of education that is based upon relationships between constituents and pedagogy” (Starr, 2010, p. 1). However, more often than not such progressive thinking does not find its way into social studies classrooms. Anderson and Cohen (2015) note that the current reforms that characterize public education do more than shape policy and curriculum; “they also influence educators’ understanding of themselves as professionals, driving at the very core of what it means to be a teacher” (p. 2). Such increased accountability measures influence the dominant discourse of the standard public school classroom, which is framed by a prescribed, normalizing, standards-based curriculum “leaving much said about the structure of schooling and less about the agentic roles within it” (Starr, 2001, p. 1). As I will explain, educational reform efforts have served to protect the dominant group’s hegemony, which Henry Giroux (1981) defines as “a form of ideological control in which dominant beliefs, values, and social practices are produced and distributed throughout a whole range of institutions such as schools, the family, mass media and trade unions” (p. 94).

Neoliberalism in Educational Reform

At a time when educational reform is guided by neoliberalism, accountability and standardization have reshaped teaching as highly technocratic and threatened the democratic possibilities of public education. The ideology of neoliberalism, which I position here as under

the guise of educational reform, proves detrimental to developing relationships that build community and promote a democratic education. Neoliberalism relies on market-based relationships to interpret the world and positions competition as the defining characteristic of human relations. As I will explain, the neoliberal tenants of rewarding merit and punishing inefficiency have had disastrous impacts on the already alarming achievement gap.

Hardly a contemporary phenomenon, achievement gaps have existed for decades between White students and racial minorities, poor students and their more affluent peers, native English speakers and students who are English Learners, and students with disabilities and those without (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). One can trace the roots of the American public's increasing concern with the performance of 'all students' in schools multiple-decades back to the middle of the twentieth century. Although the purposes for these concerns vary based upon the time-period, all have been met by prescriptive federal policy measures targeted at 'fixing' our nations' 'failing' public schools. For example, the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (1965) grew out of a concern for civil rights and social justice. *A Nation at Risk* (1983) emerged as the result of cold war posturing between the United States and the then-Soviet Union. In the recent era, the *No Child Left behind Act* (NCLB) of 2001 correlated to domestic concerns about global economic competition. Over the last three decades, neoliberal policies and practices, in particular, have transformed the landscape of education in the United States.

Contemporary neoliberal educational policies of narrow accountability, standardized testing, and heavy compliance measures collectively serve to frame education through a discourse of blame and standardization. Federal policy assumes fault for the ever-present achievement gap on behalf of individual students, schools and teachers - rather than social, cultural, and economic issues that contribute to educational injustice (Angus, 2013). The

technical-managerial, product-oriented approaches to education which have resulted, offer little discretion at the local level and in turn tend to push teachers toward assuming an impersonal attitude towards students and communities.

In the frantic quest to compete globally, policy-makers and administrators alike have “stripped the educational experience for teachers, students, and parents to one of conformity and rote recall of information” (Stout, 2016, p. 32). So deeply embedded in our collective consciousness is the assumption that “schools conform to a natural, ‘real’ social order which has a neutral, underlying value consensus” (Angus, 2013, p. 171), educators often fail to recognize teaching as the political act that it truly is. By treating conventional educational arrangements as if they occur naturally, the strict accountability-based approach reifies existing social and political conditions which are taken as ‘truth’

The Impact of Educational Reform on the Achievement Gap

Federally mandated regimes of standardized testing, in particular the recently reformed and reauthorized NCLB Act, failed in its primary effort to close the achievement gap between White and black students as concluded in the 2009 report of the National Assessment of Educational Progress titled The Nation’s Report Card (Mathis & Trujillo, 2016). Academic disparities continue to exist nationwide, according to Stanford Graduate School of Education research based on a massive new data set recently generated from more than 200 million tests scores (Rabinovitz, 2016). In particular, the study found that almost every school district enrolling large numbers of low-income students had an average academic performance that is significantly below the national grade-level average. Sean Reardon, a Stanford education professor, explains “The socioeconomic profile of a district is a powerful predictor of the average test score performance of students in that district” (Rabinovitz, 2016). The research also

revealed that nearly all school districts in the United States with substantial minority populations have large achievement gaps between their White and black and White and Hispanic students. Clearly, high-stakes testing does not get at the root of the social issues faced by poor and people of color. While hope for a more localized, participatory approach to educational reform exists in the form of the 2015 Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), a reauthorization of the NCLB federal education law which hands a significant amount of authority back to the states, the structural legacy of three-plus decades of institutional inequality resulting from various neoliberal reform agendas paint an uncertain picture of the future.

Deprofessionalization

In sum, neoliberal policies have resulted in the deprofessionalization of teaching. Professor Richard Milner (2013), the Helen Faison Endowed Chair of Urban Education at the University of Pittsburgh, cites three main areas of deprofessionalization in a policy brief he wrote for the National Education Policy Center: (i) alternative (fast-track or no-track) teacher preparation and licensure; (ii) the adoption of policies that evaluate teachers based on students' test score gains, and specifically, those based on value-added assessment; and (iii) scripted, narrowed curricula (Mathis & Trujillo, 2016). Milner's brief is extensive and here I only highlight a few main areas that can negatively impact teaching as a profession. Fast-track teacher preparation programs cannot adequately emphasize pedagogy – the heart of teaching. Value-added assessments, or the evaluation of teachers based on students' test scores, pressures teachers to 'teach to the test' in order to meet a policy focus which privileges student outcomes. In addition, such measures significantly disregard the variation and nuances of teaching. A scripted, narrow curriculum is the product of the first two impacts, emphasizing teaching as technical and limiting teacher autonomy. Given the high stakes of test-based policies, it is not

surprising that schools have limited teacher discretion to wander from the script. The narrowed curriculum can in fact demoralize expert teachers and stultify learning by reducing teaching and learning to a mechanical process (Mathis & Trujillo, 2016).

Unfortunately, the continued existence of the achievement gap reflects how the burden of deprofessionalization has fallen most heavily on low-income urban students who are most likely to receive a scripted, test driven education, provided either by inexperienced or deprofessionalized teachers (Anderson, 2001).

A like-minded colleague recently packaged this dilemma in a most effective manner. Producing a weathered smile to cover up the wide-array of powerful emotions she had already experienced before the mid-point of the work week, this colleague described how it almost seems *illogical* that educators who are committed to a social justice agenda must function within a professional climate which sits largely in contrast to these very ideals. This bit of insight serves as a point of transition from a wide-lens – represented in this broad, contextual overview and description of federal policy measures and their respective impacts of education in the United States - to that of a narrow lens reflecting my positionality within the context of the problem.

Critical Consciousness

Putting it all together, if teaching is always political, then teaching for social justice requires educators to be able to critique every aspect of their craft. Critical consciousness offers a framework for understanding what is involved in this type of critique. Nieto and McDonough (2011) illustrate the concept thoroughly, explaining:

...critical consciousness involves critiquing relations of power, questioning one's assumptions about reality, and reflecting on the complexities of multiple identities [Freire, 1973; Nieto et al.,

2008]. Research and pedagogy related to critical consciousness explore the intersection of power in relation to identities and the function of schools. It also positions...teachers to be change agents. Educators who demonstrate critical consciousness have the ability and the will to theorize and politicize their experiences. Knowing they are located in a variety of social spaces, critically conscious educators question their own positions [Gatimu, 2009]. (p. 366)

Nieto (2000) posits that efforts to engage in this praxis must begin with acts of critical self-reflection upon one's own identity and privilege because "how we see the world is connected to how we perform our roles". Many teachers, particularly the young and inexperienced, may not be consciously aware of all of their beliefs, values, and assumptions – which are culturally formed through socialization within the differing groups with which we affiliate. Thus, cultural identity helps to shape what teachers believe to be right, true, and good in student learning and schools. Because of the complex connection among culture, identity, privilege, and teachers' practices, an important part of learning to teach is to explore who one is culturally and racially.

Research literature from the field of education demonstrates that knowledge of self or selves is a crucial element in the way teachers construe and construct the nature of their work (Ball & Goodson, 1985; Day, Elliot & Kington, 2005; Kelchtermans & Vandenberghe, 1994;) and that events and experiences in the personal lives of teachers are intimately linked to the performance of their professional roles (Acker, 1999; Ball & Goodson, 1985; Day et al. 2006; Goodson & Hargreaves, 1996). Further, it is widely recognized that the broader cultural, policy and social structures in which teachers live and work, the emotional contexts and the personal

and professional elements of teachers' lives, experiences, beliefs and practices are integral to one another (Day et al. 2006). To put it another way, teachers need to know who they are as people, understand the contexts in which they teach, and continuously question their knowledge and assumptions (Cross, 2003; Hyland, 1998; Kailin, 1999, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 2001; Milner, 2003).

Personal Context of the Problem

Over the course of a lifetime, I have observed many a teacher of the dominant culture to uncritically accept, or further, readily comply with the educational reform measures described in the previous section.

I was one of them.

The reasons for not just mere compliance, but rather unconditional acceptance are diverse. Most commonly, we, as members of the dominant culture, have been socialized into perceiving these measures as just another part of the 'natural order' – inherent 'truths' that many of us are unable to recognize due to a lack of awareness pertaining to our own culture as just that – a culture. In a sense, we have been acculturated not to see our own culture. Once again, there are specific beliefs, values, actions, habits, and ideologies which are the 'good', 'legitimate', and 'correct'. These lead to college acceptance, employment, and of course, the income level which indicates to others our positionality in relation to these ideals – our worth as individuals. Adding on to Freire's (1995) assertion that "we cannot teach what we do not know (p. 89), I posit that we cannot think about or reflect upon what we cannot recognize or see.

In an autoethnographic account detailing the impact of his dominant-culture positionality on low-income, minority students, Mathew McLean (2014, p. 10) posits:

I am the problem. I am writing this autoethnography with the foundational belief that the problem starts with me. I am a Western educator born and raised in White suburbs. Many of my Western values have played a dominant role in my classroom because I reproduced the same classroom structures I was familiar with as a child and assumed these structures worked for all students [Giroux, 1984].

Although the geographical context of McLean's experience is far removed from my own (he served as a middle school teacher in an urban community near Boston, Massachusetts), our plight is common. Within the cultural fields of my upbringing, the social dimensions of education went almost entirely unquestioned. My family, the community, and the schools that I attended served to collectively cultivate a 'legitimate' knowledge. In turn, I worked to perpetuate this knowledge as both a student and then as teacher. If I had stayed in New Jersey, it is very likely that I would still perceive this 'knowledge' as nothing less than the absolute 'truth'. Instead, Hawai'i's physical, cultural, and ideological isolation from that of the United States mainland had a profound impact on the stories I had both internalized and perpetuated as a result of my upbringing.

As a Caucasian male living in Hawai'i, I am identified as a 'haole' – a term that meant “without breath” or “foreigner” in the Hawaiian language when Captain James Cook arrived in 1778; it now means “White person” (Rohrer, 2005). Today, I am a White “haole” living and teaching in Hawai'i, immersed in a culture that is often at odds with my own. The cultural norms that I took for granted while growing up in New Jersey - both conscious beliefs and hidden assumptions - have been continuously contested and challenged as I have navigated my

personal and professional life here for almost a decade. The islands that make up the Hawai‘i archipelago are among the most geographically isolated locales on earth, located almost two-thousand miles away from the nearest continental land mass. I originate from the mainland of the United States, where state residents can proudly proclaim “I am a Californian” or “I am a Texan”. Such discourse does not apply to Hawai‘i – that is, a resident of this state cannot assert “I am a Hawaiian” unless he or she is in fact of Hawaiian ancestry. Many of us are just that – *residents*.

A multifaceted concept, *haole* is much more than a noun/thing, more than a “definable delimited person/group” but instead can be best described as “contingent, performative, and multivalent” (Rohrer, 2005, p. 2). The dominant popular discourse in the islands equates all *haoles* in one group characterized by colonial past, capitalism, racism, militarism, and globalization (Ohnuma, 2002). Ohnuma (2002) clarifies the concept adequately for those unfamiliar with Hawai‘i:

For while a Caucasian appearance might open doors to jobs and privilege, “*haole*” as an identity is not the same as White.

Whiteness is not a culture; it is a position the local *haole* does not know how to take. And localism is a position they are often still not allowed to take (p. 283).

Identifying a dominant culture in Hawai‘i is a difficult endeavor. It is often remarked that Hawai‘i is a “singular American exception to the invisibility of Whiteness” (Ohnuma, 2002, p. 274). That is, one can argue that Hawai‘i is a place where the structures of oppression are not present, where Whiteness does not enjoy the comforts of privilege. In addition (and sometimes including, depending on context) to native-Hawaiians, there exists a unique cultural construct for

those in Hawai‘i deemed *more* than residents. Although subject to debate, it is generally accepted that in popular discourse the construct of “local” is used to describe individuals who embody the Polynesian and Asian values and interactional styles of generations of Hawai‘i residents (Reed, 2006).

To those visiting these islands today, it becomes quickly apparent that the amount of ethnic diversity in Hawai‘i is immense. At a glance, Hawai‘i’s citizens embody the physical and cultural characteristics that advocates of multiculturalism dream about. A recent analysis of U.S. Census data (2013) reveals that Hawai‘i leads the nation in regards to the proportion of the state population (56.9%) who identify as Asian. This is due largely in part to the American-imposed plantation culture of the 19th and early 20th centuries that was characterized by waves of immigration from China, Japan, Korea, and the Philippines. In addition to a large Asian presence, Hawai‘i also boasts a large population of individuals of Portuguese and Puerto Rican ancestry – also products of the need for labor during the plantation era. Yet if one was to scratch below the surface of Hawai‘i’s pluralistic culture, he or she would become aware that the tolerance, peaceful coexistence, and harmonious ethnic relations highlighted by politicians and the tourism industry alike serve as a veneer. This discourse - deemed the “racial harmony model” - has been highlighted by the previously mentioned parties for decades. Promoting Hawai‘i as a place characterized by equality, sensitivity, and opportunity for all peoples, these parties seek to benefit their own agendas (Rohrer 2006).

This bit of information provides but a brief, one-dimensional insight into the cultural framework of Hawai‘i. As a result, I am left with a feeling of slight “outsiderness” that I believe is going to last my whole life. The marking of “insiders” and “outsiders” in Hawai‘i is primarily based upon cultural guidelines which vary due to the complexity of social stratification in

Hawai‘i. My personal immersion into Hawaiian culture has been a convoluted journey through which I have become aware of the multiple identities that I straddle. Identity formation in Hawai‘i is directly connected to racialization, which is otherwise known as the process of imbuing a person with a consciousness of race distinctions (Rohrer, 2005). Thus, regardless of how consumed I become with my role as an educator, my identity as a teacher is not all that I am. To many, I am labeled as just another “haole” before I even have the opportunity to demonstrate qualities that might distinguish me from others.

Teacher identity is especially significant in Hawai‘i’s public schools, where a predominantly Asian-American and White teaching force (Chinn, 2006) finds itself face to face with a student population whose demographic data, beliefs, and values are not congruent to their own. Native Hawaiians and Filipino students, who collectively represent the bottom of the state’s social hierarchy, make up nearly half the public student population. In Hawai‘i, cultural differences “align Asian and Pacific Island groups in collective contrast to U.S. mainland values and interactive styles” (Reed, 2001, p. 197). As such, identity is negotiated in a changing social, historical, and cultural context. It’s local, nonlocal, and haole terminologies are “imprecise and flexible – they are historically situated, continuously contested, and partially rule driven” (Reed, 2001, p. 196). The state’s lack of an ethnic majority, combined with the legacy of colonization, has led to a heightened awareness of ethnic and cultural difference.

Purpose of the Study

There has been little examination, from a personal point-of-view, of how critically conscious teachers *become*. There exists a disturbing absence of literature on how to adequately prepare current educators to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student population. Providing models and support for practice in critical reflection is a necessary step toward

developing critical consciousness (Gay & Kirkland, 2003). Unfortunately, this is not the case in many instances because teacher reflection is often presented as unproblematic (Grant & Agosto, 2008). In their teacher education courses, Gay and Kirkland design opportunities for preservice teachers to practice engaging in cultural critical consciousness and personal reflection.

According to them, “This practice should involve concrete situations, guided assistance, and specific contexts and catalysts” (p. 186) using real-life experiences from the preservice educators’ classroom practice. Gay and Kirkland (2003) guide their students to move beyond merely discussing race and racism to transforming their newly developing critical thoughts into classroom practice

The purpose of this dissertation is to provide a personalized account of one Social Studies teacher’s use of critically reflective teaching in becoming an agent of change. This dissertation is about a journey of change in instruction fostered by a change of identity as a Social Studies teacher. Thus, at its core, this dissertation chronicles the identity construction of the teacher. More specifically, it is an effort to understand the subjectivities that have shaped my experiences (my ‘curriculum’) and the meaning I have derived from them. Central to this research will be the critical exploration of the multiple personal and professional selves and the roles they play in the formation of my teaching self. Through this inquiry, I seek to highlight the invisible social, cultural, and political forces in Hawai‘i that have shaped my sense of self. Within the context of this study, the intersectionality of such forces – gender, race, ethnicity, education, nationality, socioeconomic status, and geography – are viewed as dependent variables in the equation of my identity, shifting as I navigate and negotiate different aspects of my identities. Similarly, I will interrogate the manner and extent to which my positionality as a male, haole ‘transplant’ living in the context of the historical framework of contemporary Hawai‘i society and teaching high

school social studies in variety of diverse settings has impacted the manner by which I have negotiated my personal beliefs, values, assumptions, perceptions, and interpretations in order to develop a teacher identity.

Through the process of studying the historically constituted subjectivities, cultural meanings, social dynamics, and discourses that have ultimately shaped my teaching identity, I seek to locate myself within my own history and culture with the goal of broadening my understanding of my own values in relation to others. Through the exploration of my own intersectionality – the multiple layers of identity, meanings associated with them, and the contexts in which they occur – I acknowledge the inevitable privileges I experience alongside marginalization and take responsibility for my subjective lenses through reflexivity. That is, my life and teaching identity are entwined; to understand one I have to understand both.

I purposefully extend beyond the attainment of an awareness of new understandings of education, honoring Freire's (1970) action-oriented notion of praxis with the aim of providing a model of critical reflection and action with which the reader may engage. The process of transforming from existing approaches to different pedagogical practice contributes to the larger purpose of this study, which is to contribute to the knowledge base of social studies education by offering insights into the ways social studies educators explore identity and the self to extend sociological understanding regarding social studies teaching and learning, and teacher identity development.

Philosophical Perspectives

Overview

At its core, this research involves critical reflection on my professional praxis. My research asks questions that are seeking to understand and illuminate rather than to measure and

quantify. These questions are multidimensional in nature, representing an attempt to understand the extent to which my life has been governed – or perhaps distorted – by largely invisible social, cultural, historical, and political forces. Such questions cannot be answered thoughtfully without the help of diverse theoretical knowledges. Spry (2001) justifies the multi-paradigmatic position concisely, contending, “Human experience is chaotic and messy, requiring a pluralism of discursive and interpretive methods that critically turn texts back upon themselves in the constant emancipation of meanings” (p. 727).

This autoethnographic inquiry is framed by a primary lens of the critical paradigm. Prior to conducting this autoethnographic work, I had settled on a multi-paradigmatic research approach that incorporated the ontologies and epistemologies of the constructivist and critical paradigms of qualitative research. Pulling the paradigms together, the foundation of the framework for this study was based upon the principle that meaning is socially constructed by human beings who operate in a reality that is shaped by power structures - a congeries of social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender factors that have been reified into a series of structures that are now taken as ‘real’ (Lincoln & Guba, 1998). This position is represented by the critical-constructivist paradigm. However, much like human experience, the process of conducting autoethnography is unpredictable.

To reify, I adopt a multi-paradigmatic approach to investigating my teacher identity, utilizing critical-constructivist theory, and its philosophical and underpinnings, as the primary theoretical perspective for this study - but engage this perspective with narrative research/inquiry as embodied within an autoethnographic methodology. The genre of narrative inquiry, in turn, addresses both a desire to understand (constructivist), and ultimately, to deconstruct, reimagine, and reconstruct (post-structuralist). In the sections that follow, I aim describe how the post-

structuralist influence on a critical-constructivist study serves to cultivate an added sense of critical reflexivity to this self-study.

Multi-Paradigmatic Approach

All research is grounded in a theoretical perspective; a philosophical stance that informs how one makes meaning (Crotty, 1998). Collectively, our philosophical stances represent larger paradigms reflecting the researcher's world view. Research paradigms are defined by Denzin and Lincoln (2011) as basic sets of beliefs that guide action. Guba and Lincoln (2005) identify five main paradigms of contemporary qualitative research: positivism, post-positivism, constructivism, critical theories, and participatory/cooperative paradigms. While these appear to line up nicely on paper, in practice paradigms are convoluted and fluid; they are not absolute. Often, autoethnographers use what Stinson (2009) terms "theoretical eclecticism", drawing on multiple paradigms in writing texts.

In line with my task to produce different knowledge, I must produce knowledge differently. I leverage Lather's (2006) re-conceptualization of the traditional qualitative paradigms, which represents a "disjunctive affirmation" of multiple ways of going about educational research. Lather's restructured paradigms are titled *predict* (positivism/post-positivism), *understand* (constructivism-interpretivism), *emancipate* (critical theories), *deconstruct* (participatory/cooperative), and *next?* A theoretical disjuncture within my self-study served to bring such eclecticism to light. This disjuncture can be located in the metaphorical space (representing the purposes of this study) between seeking to *understand* (where a meaning emerges), to *emancipate* (where attempts are made to equalize power relations and promote social justice), and the desire to *deconstruct* (where meaning disintegrates so that it can be reconstructed in a manner which empowers rather than marginalizes).

Autoethnographic Methodology

Ironically, an autoethnographic methodology was selected for this study of human experience because of its inherent "un- methodological" characteristics. Autoethnography represents an avenue of philosophical (e.g. methodological, epistemological, and ontological) freedom that serves to foster a holistic exploration of the research questions, which frame this inquiry. In this regard, autoethnography also represents a location where constraints imposed by the "politics of knowledge" are largely absent. Through its focus on using the researcher's own experience as data for theoretical analysis, the autoethnographic methodology in itself represents form of resistance to the positivist edict of objective distance from the data.

Essentially, there are few regulations on how to write out an autoethnographic narrative analysis, as it is the meaning of the story that is important, rather than conventions of scholarly production. Conceptualised as "research, writing, story, and method that connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social and political" (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006, p. 189), autoethnography entails the researcher/practitioner performing a narrative analysis of his/her experience of a particular phenomenon. I write to understand what is not known.

Richardson (1994; as cited in Wall, 2006, p. 6) purported that writing is a:

...method of inquiry, a way of finding out about yourself and your topic. Although we usually think about writing as a form of "telling" about the social world . . . writing is also a way of 'knowing'—a method of discovery and analysis. By writing in different ways, we discover new aspects of our topic and our relationship to it. Form and content are inseparable [p. 516, italics in original].

An autoethnographic methodology supports the cultivation of a philosophical foundation that honors the multi-faceted, wide-ranging purpose of my study, as well as the uncertainty which characterizes its nature. Moreover, autoethnography promotes critical reflexivity, which involves critically analyzing and challenging the dominant paradigms of our world view (Morley, 2013). This is done in a way that highlights the socially constructed and contested nature of knowledge, and therefore our capacity for agency.

The Constructivist Paradigm

The primary focus of autoethnographic works grounded in the paradigm of *understand* is to share and make sense of life experience. With respect to ontology, the user of basic autoethnography would assume “personal reality” to be a psychological, social, and cultural construction. Due to its inherent emphasis on cultural analysis, autoethnographic work adopts a social-constructivist position. McIlveen (2008) notes that autoethnographer places “varying emphasis upon internality, externality, and personal agency, across the constructivism and social constructionism divide [cf. Young & Collin, 2004]” (p. 3). Texts in the constructivist paradigm - which has its roots, among others, in philosophical hermeneutics, phenomenology, and symbolic interactionism - rely on a variety of interpretive theories (McIlveen, 2008). As such, autoethnography proceeds as an interpretive process.

Drawing from the insights of an interpretive (hermeneutic) paradigm rather than a scientific, critical, or rhetorical paradigm, autoethnography owes its intellectual roots more to the work of phenomenologists who argue that we can reach the truth only by understanding and interpreting our experience (Poulos, 2013). In the tradition of hermeneutic phenomenology, experience and knowledge are not fixed, stable categories; rather, they are ongoing interpretive constructions. Autoethnographers enter their texts into a dialogue about what human experience

might *mean*, rather than as a claim to universal knowledge. In line with the sentiment put forth by Chang and Boyd (2011), it is not my categories, methods, or knowledge that connects me to others, “it is my entry into their world on their terms that creates connection” (p. 82). This research genre’s potency lies in its ability to resonate in others.

The Critical Paradigm

The initial act of conducting autoethnography involves the creation of self-narratives. A ‘tool ‘within the larger ‘tool box’ that is the genre of narrative inquiry, self-narrative – writing oneself into story - is utilized here as an instrument for sense-making purposes pertaining to my experiences. The paradigm of criticalism complements and extends the constructivist design space, specifically pertaining to the analysis of my self-narratives by giving due emphasis on political factors. First, the critical paradigm, like the constructivist paradigm, understands realities as constructed and constituted in social practices. However, the critical paradigm, to a greater degree than the constructivist paradigm, emphasizes that realities emerge from a congeries of social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender factors (Crotty, 2003; Lincoln & Guba, 1998;). Next, the critical paradigm, like the constructivist paradigm, understands realities as emerging from individuals and groups’ practices that articulate, constitute, and maintain social constructions. However, the critical paradigm, to a greater degree than the constructivist paradigm, emphasizes individuals and groups’ practices as situated in historical and social structures (Crotty, 2003; Lincoln & Guba, 1998).

In addition to its interpretative structuralist methodological stance, the critical paradigm is distinctive for its substantive claim about the nature of society in which it is embedded. In emphasizing historical and social structures, critical theorists conceptualize society as a system of domination and reveal an ontological perspective of historical realism.

Autoethnographic work, grounded in the paradigm of emancipation, attempts to equalize power relations and/or promote social justice in society. The critical user extends the social constructivist epistemological position to further emphasize ‘knowing’ (which shapes one’s personal reality) as value-mediated, and therefore embedded in ideologies (Lincoln & Guba, 1998). Combining the methodology of autoethnography with the critical research paradigm permits me to ‘swim against the tide’ of norms established by the dominant society, problematizing my own actions and practices from a sociocultural, critical, and ultimately a poststructural perspective.

The Critical-Constructivist Paradigm

At this juncture, I have drawn upon constructivist and critical theory in order to position the methodology of autoethnography within the paradigms to understand and emancipate (Lather, 1991). This decision reflects the nature of my research questions and is represented through an adoption a multi-paradigmatic research approach that incorporates the ontologies and epistemologies of the interpretivism/constructivism and criticalism-ideological paradigms. Pulling the paradigms together, the foundation of the framework for this study is based upon the principle that meaning is socially constructed by human beings who operate in a reality that is shaped by power structures - a congeries of social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender factors that have been reified into a series of structures that are now taken as ‘real’ (Lincoln & Guba, 1998). Collectively, these paradigms collide at this intersection and take the form of a critical-constructivist paradigm. A central dimension of the critical-constructivist perspective involves gaining awareness of ourselves as social, cultural, and historical beings. People who gain such an awareness, Kincheloe (2005) asserts, understand “[...] how and why their political opinions, religious beliefs, gender roles or racial perspectives have been shaped by

dominant perspectives” (p. 81). Thus, by adopting a critical-constructivist perspective, I seek to understand the *forces* that construct knowledge - believing that a virtual reality shaped by power and historical forces influence co-constructed realities (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). To summarize, in the critical constructivist formulation knowledge is constructed in minds of human beings – minds that are constructed by the society around them (Tobin, 1993).

Theoretical Framework for Exploring Teacher Identity

Overview

The theoretical framework for this study represents a synthesis of theoretical perspectives. The tools are primarily from the social constructivist and critical theory paradigms of qualitative research described in the preceding section. In addition, I explore a poststructuralist lens as a means of demonstrating deep critical reflexivity within my analyses. Through my work, I seek to “describe, decode, translate, and otherwise come to terms with the meaning” (Van Maanen, 1979, p. 520; as cited in Williams, 2014, p. 64) of the subjectivities which inform my identity and shape my experience as a “transplant” teacher in Hawai‘i. My dissertation takes the form of an investigation into the changes in identity and understanding of self that occurred when living through moments of existential crisis. It is also an investigation of self-creation, as I feel my research actively reshapes me as I proceed. At its core, this study represents a teacher’s attempt to make sense of the world and his place in it. I seek to make meaning rather than to prove; to uncover rather than to validate. This structure of this study positions the inquiry itself as the catalyst for methodology. In line with this approach, I was tasked with developing a theoretical framework which would serve to facilitate my investigation – and at times, interrogation - of how things came to be the way they are, what social forces

sustain and maintain the situation, and how people accommodate, resist and interrupt prevailing discourses, amongst other factors. This pursuit demands critical reflection and critical reflexivity. The theoretical framework for this study (*Figure 1*) was addresses my research purpose and goals. Taken together, the framework is comprised four layers: critical autoethnography (Layer 1), critical theory (Layer 2), post-structuralist tools (Layer 3), and teacher identity theory (Layer 4). The theoretical framework is comprised of three different shapes: a triangle, a pentagon, and a square. The use of three distinct shapes has both symbolic and practical meaning/applications.

Symbolically, the use of three distinct shapes reflects the multi-paradigmatic approach which undergirds the investigation of my teacher identity. In addition, the inclusion of three shapes into a unitary framework serves to reinforce the researcher's core assumption that there exist multiple ways of 'knowing'. The three shapes also serve a practical purpose; my theoretical framework is designed to address the messy, chaotic reality of working both in and across research paradigms, and in particular the "theoretical eclecticism" (Stinson, 2009) present in this study. The framework is structured to facilitate the process of leveraging important 'tools' (theories) from their respective 'toolboxes' (research paradigms) while also serving as a general 'blueprint' for this particular model of critical autoethnographic inquiry. Theories and other applicable constructs of the three research paradigms are positioned within the framework in a manner aimed to locating, exposing, and utilizing their complimentary attributes to promote critical reflexivity. As one framework, this approach aims to generate a more holistic understanding of the phenomena addressed by my inquiry, and subsequently, to ensure the cultivation of a "thick description" of this phenomenon.

Layer 1: Critical Autoethnography

The triangle is positioned at the center of the framework, representing its core. Critical autoethnography, which represents the ‘heart’ of my theoretical framework, is positioned directly in the center of the triangle. The metaphorical human heart is like a piece of paper. It goes through many different folds and changes and can become virtually any shape or form. But the hard creases, the folds unfolded, will remain forever but can be used to create new shapes as well. This metaphor also applies to the autoethnographic model of inquiry, which is the ‘heart’ of my research endeavor. This research represents a journey towards an unknown and undefined ending. I acknowledge that the study of painful human experience through a variety of distinct theoretical lenses - and the philosophies underpinning these lenses - will undoubtedly be a messy, emotional, non-linear, and fragmented pursuit.

The shape itself – a triangle - represents the triad of research paradigms which guide the approach of this multi-faceted inquiry. These are represented by Lather’s (2006) paradigmatic conceptualizations of understand, emancipate, and deconstruct. These constructs sit *inside* the triangle, part of the core foundation upon which this model of inquiry resides upon. The act of initially constructing self-narratives, for example, aligns with the constructivist paradigm of understand. At this early stage in the autoethnographic process, the subject seeks to make-meaning of experience. The paradigms of emancipate and deconstruct, which respectively serve to structure the complex narrative analysis process to follow, are of little significance to one who has yet to engage in critical reflective practice. These paradigms (critical theory and post-structuralism) extend into the external layers that bind the autoethnographic core of my theoretical framework.

Layer 2: Triad of Theories from the Critical Paradigm

After the construction of initial self-narratives (notice I never use the word ‘complete’ here), the autoethnographer has (knowingly or unknowingly) already begun the ongoing process of narrative analysis and interpretation. However, initial acts of analysis are generally uncritical in nature; reflections of our pre-reflexive worldviews. A synthesis of the critical theories of intersectionality (Anthias, 2005; Crenshaw, 1989, 1991), cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986), and critical Whiteness (DiAngelo, 2011; Frankenberg, 1993; Leonardo, 2002, 2004; McLaren, 1998) bound the autoethnographic core of the theoretical framework. This theoretical triad, which together represent the theoretical position of the emancipate paradigm, is positioned on the outside boundaries of the triangular critical autoethnographic core. Taken together, these constructs represent the first layer of critical reflection and engagement with the self-narratives. Arrows link together the triad of constructs representing the critical paradigm in this layer while also crossing the paradigmatic boundary between autoethnography and critical theory in order to demonstrate the critical-constructivist position which emerges at this juncture. The labels of ‘interrogate’ and ‘understand’ are positioned purposely in manner that blurs the boundaries of the triangle in order to emphasize the non-linear nature of the autoethnographic shift in consciousness from understand to emancipate – this consciousness does not occur at a predetermined juncture. As the specific elements within each critical theory interacts with both context and each other, an ongoing cycle of new meanings/awareness/shifts in consciousness naturally begets further autoethnographic inquiry (in no particular order): introspection, writing, research, analysis, interpretation, application to other narratives, etc.

Layer 3: Poststructuralist Tools

The triad of critical theories is encapsulated within a larger pentagon. This five-sided shape represents the key poststructuralist constructs of discourse, subjectivity, agency, power, and truth. As acts of writing, analysis, and interpretation often occur simultaneously during the autoethnographic process, cyclical symbols are positioned between the critical theory and poststructuralist constructs. Meanings emerging from both initial and critical layers of analysis will be subjugated to further examination/interrogation through a poststructuralist lens for the purpose of disrupting, destabilizing, and ultimately problematizing subject positions in order to promote an even deeper sense of reflexivity. For example, one who re-examines how a social identity such as race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, etc. (or a combination of these) interacts with a specific context through a poststructuralist lens is likely to discover new meaning/s - how power operates in that context, the discourses which serve to perpetuate this power, the positionality of individuals/groups as privileged and/or oppressed, etc.

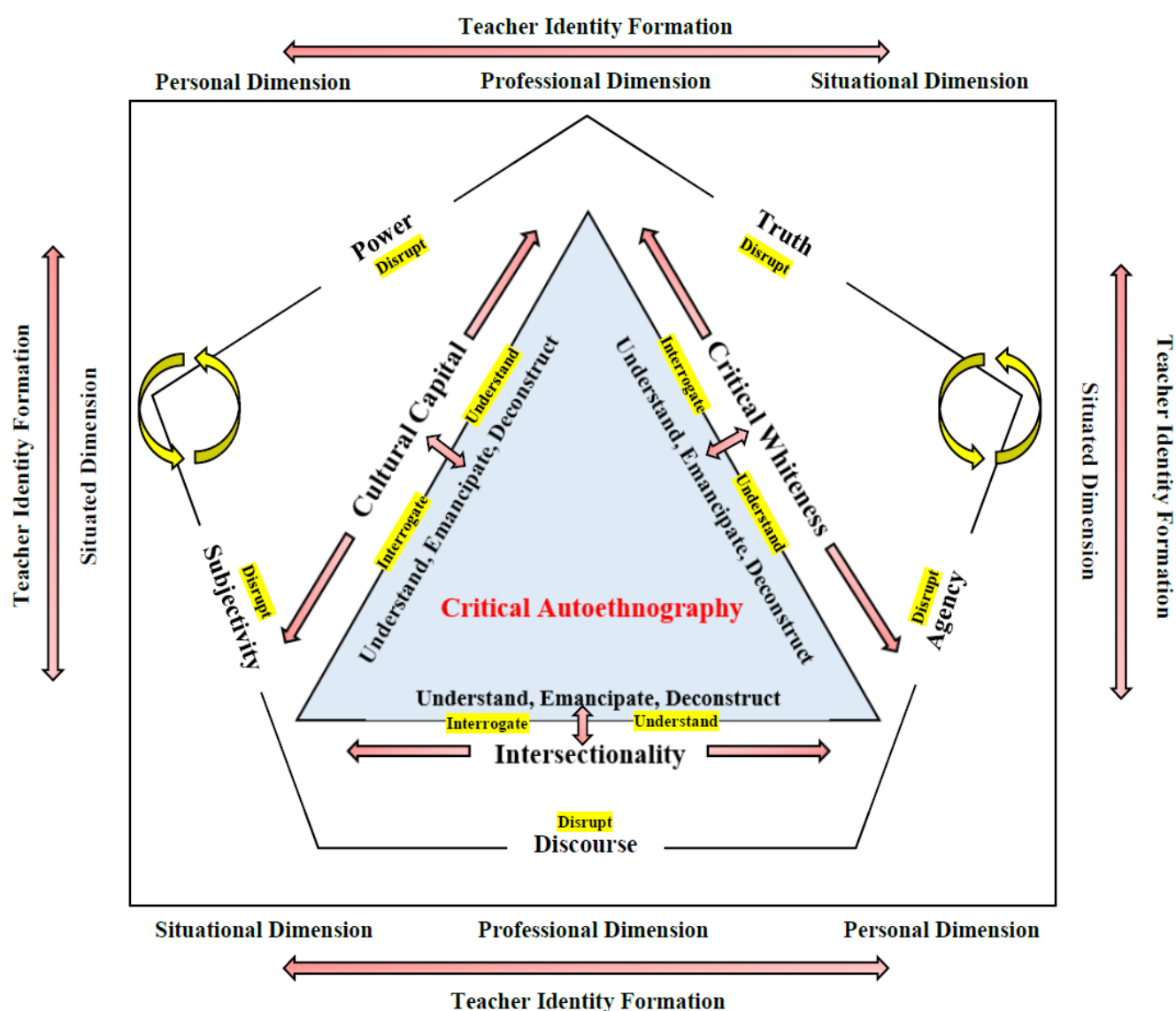
New learning/awareness ultimately serves as the roots of further inquiry both within and across paradigms. A primary goal involves engaging in the ongoing interplay between the theoretical constructs across all layers of this theoretical framework. New meaning is continuously generated. On countless occasions, I believed I had come to grasp the meaning of a certain critical incident only to have that meaning disrupted by learning/awareness spurred by critical reflection on a separate critical incident.

Layer 4: Teacher Identity Formation

All of the theoretical perspectives and theories described in the preceding sections are positioned within a larger square representing a conceptual framework for investigating my teacher identity construction. The positionality of a conceptual framework for exploring my

teacher identity as straddling all other features of this theoretical framework reflects the primary purpose of this autoethnographic inquiry: to better understand my teaching identity. The conceptual framework used here for investigating teacher identity incorporates Day et al.'s (2006) framework for teacher identity – encompassing the personal, professional, and situational dimensions of one's being – and Alsup's (2006) notion of "situated identities".

Figure 1 *Theoretical Framework for Investigating Teacher Identity*



Definition of Key Terms

For the purposes of this research, the following terms apply:

Identity. Defining “identify” proves difficult due to the many ways in which the word has been used over time. In the literatures of education, the concept of identity is quite widely used but is taken to mean rather different things in different contexts. Conceptual definitions of identity draw on a number of theoretical disciplines, especially philosophy, psychology, sociology and psychotherapy. For the purpose of this study, Beijaard’s (1995) definition of identity as “who or what someone is, the various meanings people can attach to themselves, or the meanings attributed by others” (p.282) will be utilized to inform and support the findings of this study. In addition, Rodgers and Scott (2008) identify four basic assumptions that are common to contemporary conceptions of identity within the field of education. Each of these characteristics will inform and support the findings of this study:

1. Identity is dependent upon and formed within multiple contexts which bring social, cultural, political, and historical forces to bear upon that formation.
2. Identity is formed in relationship with others and involves emotions.
3. Identity is shifting, unstable, and multiple.
4. Identity involves the construction and reconstruction of meaning through stories over time.

Teacher Identity/Professional Identity. The concepts are ‘teacher identity’ and ‘professional identity’ and are often used interchangeably within the professional literature. Within this study,

the term ‘teacher identity’ will be utilized because of the possibility for confusion stemming from my use of Day et al.’s (2006) notion of a “professional dimension” of teacher identity. In line with the view expressed by Beijaard et al. (2004), teacher identity is understood here as an ongoing process of integration of the ‘personal’ and ‘professional’ sides of becoming and being a teacher” (p. 113).

Positionality. Kincheloe and Steinberg’s (1998) description of this construct most accurately represents its intended meaning within this self-study. The authors’ explain:

Positionality involves the notion that since our understanding of the world and ourselves is socially constructed, we must devote special attention to the differing ways individuals from diverse social backgrounds construct knowledge and make meaning. (p. 3)

In sum, awareness of one’s positionality involves a reciprocal awareness of both self and “Other” as socially-constructed and context-dependent.

Discourse. Discourses are systems of thought, or knowledge claims, which assume an existence independent of a particular speaker (Foucault, 1978).

Subjectivity. Our sense of self—our subjectivity—is constructed through our engagement with a multitude of discourses. In Foucault’s work, the construction of subject positions shapes our acceptance of relations of unequal social power.

Agency. Rather than seeing agency as residing in individuals as a property or capacity, the ecological view of agency – as it is used here - sees agency as an emergent phenomenon of the ecological conditions through which it is enacted. In other words, agency is not something that people can have; it is something that people do. It denotes a ‘quality’ of the engagement of actors

with temporal-relational contexts-for-action, not a quality of the actors themselves (Biesta & Tedder, 2007).

Significance of Study

This study is significant for several reasons. First, knowledge of teaching identity is critical to teachers with regards to the work they do in classrooms. Educational researchers have increasingly concluded that the professional development of a teacher is interrelated and intersects with the personal development of the individual (Bullough, Knowles & Crow, 1992; Hamachek, 1999; Kelchtermans, 1996; Spodek, 1996; Van den Berg, 2002). Teachers need to understand their identity to better engage with students and the curriculum. An understanding of teacher identity may impact student thinking and learning. Teacher dispositions are of significant importance in shaping the school experience of students and either broadening or foreclosing their opportunities to grow and achieve (Nelson, 2010). Teachers implement policy and shape and interpret what it will look like for students. When applied to teacher's pedagogy, the process of excavating personal history in order to articulate a teacher's identity becomes "a way to put that identity on the line and risk needing to reform and recreate the self while also attempting to transform curricula" (Samaras, Hicks & Garvey Berger, 2004, p. 915). The process utilized by the teacher in this study provides a method of self-examination and identity construction for other social studies classroom teachers who want to understand their teaching identities at a given moment in time and subsequently improve their practices.

In addition, this study is significant to any teachers who want to better understand themselves. This study also has relevance because it will describe the process of how a classroom teacher takes ownership of self-improvement. This study provides a model for how to better understand one's teaching identity and the selves that play roles in constructing that

identity. Teaching is personal; teachers need to understand themselves and the identities that they reveal to students. To understand the complexity of teaching identity, teachers need to define and understand their roles as well as the context, interaction, and impact that takes place within a classroom. This study provides one way for teachers to look at themselves and their work to increase their understandings. This study provides one path to Greene's (1995) notion of wide-awakeness, an increased awareness of self and selves. Through critical reflection and writing, teachers can see themselves.

Research Questions

My research questions are designed to connect the personal to broader cultural, social and educational practices and discourses. The following questions will guide my inquiry process:

1. What are the significant social, cultural, and political forces in Hawai'i that have shaped my personal and professional identity formation?
2. How does my positionality (cultural outsider) as a haole in Hawai'i impact my personal beliefs, values, and assumptions and the development of a critical consciousness?
3. How do my multiple identities interface with the ethnographic characteristics of the schools where I have taught?
4. How do my personal and professional roles influence my teaching identity?
5. What can we learn from my study that can be used to by others in order to become successful teachers in Hawai'i?

Overview of Dissertation

This dissertation, which takes the form of critical autoethnography, chronicles my journey of identity construction. It also represents an effort to effectively communicate a unique

praxis aimed at fostering a critical consciousness. In sum, this dissertation is organized into 5 chapters.

Chapter 1 of this dissertation presents an overview of this study in congruence with a description of the researcher's positionality through an examination of my background and interrogation of the self as it has been socially, culturally, historically, and politically constructed. I provide a description of the research problem, which is framed by two additional lenses representing political and personal perspectives. Subsequently, I propose solutions for the research problem through an introduction of the purpose for this autoethnographic inquiry. Next, I provide a detailed narrative of a multi-paradigmatic framework that reflects the multi-faceted nature of my inquiry. Chapter 1 concludes with the definitions of key terms and the presentation of the research questions that frame this study.

In Chapter 2, I highlight relevant literature focusing on investigating the concepts of 'identity' and 'self' through lenses representing the psychological/developmental, sociocultural, critical, and poststructuralist perspectives. This is followed by a thorough review of the scholarly literature regarding the concept of teacher identity formation and constructed within the unique context of Hawai'i. In the next section, I provide an analysis of the critical paradigm which frames my work, beginning with an overview of critical race theory and subsequently reviewing the relevant constructs from this paradigm which frame my inquiry: intersectionality theory, cultural capital theory, and critical Whiteness studies. The final section of my literature review highlights the concept of critical consciousness through a description detailing the evolution of reflective teaching, from its early origins to the concepts which have built upon its foundations: critical reflection, reflexivity, and ultimately, critical consciousness.

Chapter 3 serves two functions: first, it details the research methodology guiding this study. Immediately following this is a presentation of the research design used within this work. Rounding out the methodology section is a comprehensive description of the autoethnographic position that ultimately frames the collective research methodology used here. Next, an overview of the current approaches/orientations of autoethnographic writing styles and analysis is followed by an explanation of my decision to adopt a hybrid position encompassing principles of both analytical and evocative autoethnography as well as a blend of writing styles. I round out the methodology section by describing the critical position within autoethnographic inquiry.

A presentation of the research design begins with a description of the participants, which is then followed by a thorough description of my data collection and analysis plan. This includes information about the storytelling method of data collection and how a grounded theory approach frames the data analysis procedures within this study. I then provide an overview of autoethnography as product, detailing the process leading to the generation of a unique ‘structured autoethnographic vignette analysis framework’ incorporating both the analytical and evocative positions within autoethnography. I complete this section with the inclusion of pertinent information about how I addressed research ethics, authenticity, and quality.

In Chapter 4, I share four autoethnographic vignettes and their respective analyses. My autoethnographic product takes the form of the ‘structured autoethnographic vignette analysis framework’ which is used to house each example. Although the vignettes will provide some cultural self-understanding concerning my evolution as a critically-conscious social studies teacher, each will be accompanied with analytic reflection, interpretation, and discussion of the events with the larger constructs of comments from other scholars about cultural capital, intersectionality, and teacher identity construction.

In the concluding Chapter 5, I provide a complete summary of my study, including a discussion of the findings, the implications for future studies, and make final comments on my experiences throughout this research piece. I discuss how the model of critical reflection leveraged in my work supported the emergence of six themes, which can be utilized to benefit other teachers in the context of Hawai'i. Finally, I utilize relevant literature to then position the impact this study may have on future research in the field of education.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Overview

This autoethnography provides a first-hand account of the power embedded within a model of critical reflection which demands first and foremost a critical self-awareness in providing an avenue towards a more reflexive and inclusive knowledge of how teacher identity is constructed. My research represents an ongoing engagement with a critical praxis through which the attainment of a personal sense of agency is renewed. Beginning with a review of the literature on the core concepts of ‘identity’ and ‘self’ across multiple theoretical perspectives, I then present a conceptual framework for the exploration of my teacher identity. Next, I review Critical Race Theory and its embedded tenants of intersectionality theory, critical Whiteness studies, and cultural capital before moving on to an overview of reflective teaching practice. Through an examination of critical reflection and reflexivity, a connection is established to critical consciousness and the overall purpose of this dissertation.

Identity and Self

Introduction

Defining “identity” is difficult in nature due to the many ways in which the word has been used over time. In the literatures of education, the concept of identity is quite widely used but is taken to mean rather different things in different contexts. Conceptual definitions of identity draw on a number of theoretical disciplines, especially philosophy, psychology, sociology and psychotherapy. Davey (2010) notes that identity has “an epistemological basis that is poorly defined and located” (p. 20), adding that there appears to be “considerable linguistic

ambiguity about the differences accorded to notions of identity, self, self-image, self-conception, experience, self-narrative, and the like, and, in many cases, such terms seem to be used more or less interchangeably” (p. 20). Korthagen (2004) notes that the body of literature focused on such concepts embraces several disciplinary areas and therefore may seem confusing or overwhelming to educationalists writing from only one perspective.

Theoretical Perspectives

Due to the complexity of the concept of identity, which has been used and conceptualized by writers, researchers, and theorists from a range of traditions and paradigms, it proves important to explore both the prevailing social science and educational approaches to researching self and identity in order to situate this study within a broader perspective. Grootenboer, Smith and Lowrie (2006) identified three views that are influential: (i) the psychological/developmental; (ii) the socio-cultural; and (iii) the post-structural. The psychological/developmental perspective primarily focuses on the individual and their identities that are mostly self-determined in response to life experiences. In contrast, the socio-cultural perspective sees identity as located internally and externally to the individual, and is developed through social interactions and practices (Zembylas, 2003). Finally, post-structural theorists deny identity as being neither individual nor social (Foucault, 1984), and furthermore, they reject the possibility of a fixed and unified self or even a single identity. These perspectives are summarized in the table below, which presents a range of discourses used by scholars of the respective ideologies when referring to the concept of identity and identity formation.

Table 1: Adapted from *Identity discourses across three theoretical perspectives* (Grootenboer, Smith & Lowrie, 2006, p. 613)

	Psychological	Sociocultural	Poststructuralist
Locus of identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Individual ▪ The “inner world” ▪ Self, self-concept, self-efficacy ▪ Intra-psychic ▪ Cognitive structures ▪ Emotion ▪ Agency, autonomy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Relational self, the “outer world” ▪ Connected to otherness ▪ Embodied ▪ Habitus, fields, cultural capital ▪ Belonging 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Non-agentic ▪ A political posture – no unified self ▪ All is relative ▪ Subjectivity rather than identity ▪ Positioning ▪ Becoming
Identity formation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Internalized behavioral repertoires ▪ Executive functions of the self (monitoring, choice making) ▪ Searching for internal integrity, autonomy, and competence ▪ Individual responsibility for who one is 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Constructed and situated ▪ Communal consciousness and identification ▪ Sociocultural reproduction and framing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Interior self is populated by others ▪ A constant becoming ▪ A function of difference ▪ Constituted by political and institutional processes
Theoretical alignments	Bandura, Erikson, Piaget	Wenger, Vygotsky, Bakhtin, Bourdieu, Bernstein	Foucault, Derrida

The researchers and theorists using psychological, sociocultural, and postmodern lenses on identity tend to focus on where identity ‘is located’ – individual (inner) or social (outer). Grootenboer, Smith and Lowrie (2006) note that “The choice of which lens to adopt seems to depend on one’s persuasions in the debate about where identity is located – that is, whether its origins are essentially individual (inner) or social (outer)” (p. 614). Cote and Levine (2002, p. 54) describe this as “the structure-agency debate” – pertaining to how much individuals exercise control that is independent of social structure versus how much social structure determines individual behavior. This review of the literature pertaining to the concept of identity is broken

down into three parts, each addressing a separate perspective on ‘identity’. While each perspective will be examined independently, the author acknowledges that the divisions between these perspectives are somewhat arbitrary as a number of theorists and researchers work across these divisions.

Psychological/developmental perspectives on identity

The historical roots of the modern Western sense of identity are constituted by the possession of an ‘inner self’. This conception of self was, throughout most of history, perceived as a singular, continuous and individual entity (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011). Descartes introduced this notion to western society during the Age of Enlightenment through his famous dictum “I think, therefore I am”. Mascolo and Fisher (1998) clarify Descartes’ statement, explaining “Because the mind is an entity unto itself, it can function free of context” (p. 333). Popular thought amongst the European intellectuals of this time period suggested that all humans possessed a unified, rational self that exerted firm control over the external world as well as its own emotions (Sengoopta, 1995).

The most significant feature of the psychological/developmental perspective is the focus on the individual. Grootenboer, Smith and Lowrie (2006) note that scholars within this tradition can be characterized by their attempts to compartmentalize and categorize aspects of identity in an effort to better comprehend and describe it. The psychological/developmental perspective includes the work of ‘classic’ theorists such as William James, Charles Horton Cooley, George Herbert Mead, and Erik Erikson. Their foundational perspectives on ‘self’ were in line with that of Western tradition; that is, ‘self’ was considered to be individualistic in nature rather than social. These theorists positioned the self as a “singular, unified, stable essence little affected by context or biography” (Day, Kington, Stobart & Sammons, 2005, p. 602). These views focused

on an individual's formation of a relatively stable system of concepts and self-image. Feedback from others, notes Davey (2013) was "filtered and interpreted subjectively" (p. 28) - yet the central self-concept system remained individually distinct from the external world. As such, psychological/developmental approaches to identity formation give *analytic primacy* (Penuel & Wertsch, 1995) – a concept described by Zembylas (2003) as "[...] the employment of a starting point that directs attention to certain phenomena and away from others" (p. 219) - to the individual to create and maintain a conception of oneself as a coherent whole.

Sociocultural perspectives on identity

Sociocultural perspectives view the self very differently as, for example, Mead and others have when they conceptualize identity as a "relational phenomenon" (Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004, p. 108) that is both individually and socially constructed, located both within and external to the individual, and involves interactions with culture and society. In this sense, identity is located both within and external to the individual and it is developed through social and cultural practices. Cote and Levine (2002) note that the sociocultural perspective views identity formation as being "steered" by society with the individual attempting to "navigate predetermined passages". To this end, identity can be seen as "...the ordered sum of all these: relationship skills, emotions, physical abilities, and so forth" (Zembylas, 2003, p. 220).

Research in the sociocultural domain is rooted more in social than individual identity – how groups of individuals operate in the world as social communities or cultures. That is, identity is conceived as a 'man-made' concept, reflecting an individual's meanings, values, attitudes, dispositions, and practices that in turn construct and are constructed from his or her background experiences and narratives about the past. As such, this perspective places analytic primacy squarely on sociocultural processes as primary influences on development and identity

formation (Zembylas, 2003). Davey (2010) explains further, noting that through the sociocultural lens “A person’s identity... is something developed through social and cultural practices within contexts of practice in the present. It is very situated in terms of the particular cultural contexts and discourses that operate within and around the individual” (p. 24).

Poststructuralist perspectives on identity

The poststructuralist perspective moves beyond the psychological/developmental and sociocultural views of identity. In general, poststructuralism refers to a range of theoretical approaches that examine the role of discourse in the construction of reality. Inspired by the writings of French social theorist Michel Foucault, the poststructuralist position challenges the idea of identity formation as being either an individual or social phenomenon. Davey (2010) clarifies “unlike Eriksonian (individual phenomenon) and sociocultural (social phenomenon) accounts of identity, which focus on the relative influences of self and others in establishing unity and community of identity over time, poststructuralist views emphasize the place of political context, discursive practice and power in identity formation” (p. 28).

Furthermore, poststructural perspectives challenge the possibility of a fixed and unified self - or even that of a single, coherent identity. Instead, poststructuralists “[...] interrogate the discursive and disciplinary places from which questions of origin are posed” (Zembylas, 2003, p. 218). Foucault (1984) argued that identity is not stable, instead postulating that it is fragmented, non-linear, dynamic, and relative, involving multiple positions. According to the poststructuralist perspective, identity is considered as being unstated, contextually driven, and emerging within interactions of a given discourse (Miyaharay, 2010). To put it another way, not only a category or a personal characteristic, identity is actually a kind of "becoming", it is social, a learning process, a nexus, and a local–global interplay (Wenger, 1998, p. 163).

Conceptual Framework for Teacher Identity

In the field of education, a growing body of research on ‘teacher professional identity’ has recently emerged as a separate research area in large part due to the significant developments that have arisen pertaining to the lenses through which we look at teaching and learning.

Korthagen (2004) highlights the rapid shift in our views about the role of the teacher, which has shifted “from someone transferring knowledge to someone guiding students” (p. 82). As a result, our respective answers to the age-old question ‘what is a good teacher?’ are increasingly diverse. Several education scholars, including Britzman (2003), Danielewicz (2001), Kelchtermans (2009) and Rodgers and Scott (2008) agree that the development of teacher identity is both dependent upon and formed within multiple contexts all related to the social, cultural, political, and historical forces that inform how teachers understand who they are. In short, a teacher’s identity is shaped by their understanding of who they are. In addition, identity is formed in relation to others; it is dynamic, multiple, and unstable (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Beijaard, Meijer & Verloop, 2004).

Olson (2015) adds further insight, postulating that teacher identity is both a product and a process. He explains, “...as product, it is the collection of influences and effects on a teacher. And yet it is also a process – a way of viewing the continuous interaction among active variables that constitute teacher development” (p. 139). “Active variables” can be understood as those related to the teachers’ immediate contexts. In an actual educational setting, these might include the school culture, student relationships, colleague relationships, and pedagogical styles. Teachers do not exist in a vacuum, and as a result active variables also include those in the immediate contexts of their personal lives as well: family and community relationships, social roles, hobbies, etc. As such, Olsen likens the concept of identity to a label for an entire collection

of influences and effects that includes teachers' immediate contexts, while also extending to prior constructs of self, social positionings, and meaning systems. These elements become intertwined in the flow of activity as the teacher simultaneously reacts to and negotiates given contexts and human relationships at given moments.

To clarify, the professional literature on teacher identity within the field of education often differs in terms of how to define, view, and study this concept; it has been explored in different ways. Although the lack of consistency across disciplines and research projects has made it difficult to agree upon a shared framework for researching and explaining teacher identity, Beijaard et al. (2004) explain that "teacher identity is an on-going process, and therefore it is a constantly evolving phenomenon" (p. 111). Further, the authors argue that teacher identity represents "the active pursuit of professional development and learning in accordance with a teacher's goals" (p. 112). In other words, the goals that drive this investigation serve as the foundation for the conceptual framework that will rest upon it.

This study is framed by an autoethnographic methodology and incorporates the critical modes of analysis which commonly foreground identity studies. At its core, teacher identity research encourages us to understand the complexity of teaching and learning in this era of rapid change, indeterminacy, and educational restructuring. The above notions of teacher identity reflect the nature of autoethnography, which Ellis and Bochner (2002) describe as "relational and institutional stories affected by history, social structure, and culture, which themselves are dialectically revealed through action, feeling, thought, and language" (739). These notions also reflect the goals of this study, which can be summarized as follows: to deepen the fields understanding of (1) how teachers' develop and (2) how who one is as a person interacts with who one is as a teacher. I position teacher identity as a multi-faceted, discontinuous, and non-

linear process and product of the interaction between individuals and their various social and professional environments (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011). To put it another way, the interrelated process of person and context in identity construction is complex and characterized by continuous interpretation and reinterpretation of experiences and encounters (Beijaard et al., 2004; Nias, 1996).

I have generated a conceptual framework for investigating teacher identity which incorporates Day et al.'s (2006) framework for teacher identity, encompassing the personal, professional and situational dimensions of one's being, and Alsup's (2006) protensive notion of "situated identities". I will describe the merit of each framework, as well as how the complimentary nature of their cohesion supports the achievement of the goals set forth for this study.

Day et al. (2006) found that teachers balance three relevant dimensions in their work: personal, professional, and situational. I purposely provide an initial description of each through a 'shallow' lens in order to promote clarity. The personal dimension is located in life outside of school and is linked to family and social roles. The professional dimension reflects social and political expectations of what a 'good' teacher is, the teacher's own educational ideals, and the influence of policy trends (Nganga, 2013). The situational dimension is located in a specific educational context and is affected by the teacher's immediate working environment. Examples of these "local conditions" include the socioeconomic status of the student population, student behavior, school leadership, support or lack thereof, relationships with co-workers, and so forth. These dimensions can be stable or unstable, positive or negative, depending on the interaction between the work and life experiences which are collectively represented across all three dimensions. It proves helpful to visualize Day et al.'s (2006) three dimensions of teacher

identity as comparable to ‘width’. Although the sheer volume of work and life experiences occurring on a day-to-day basis can be significant, the organizational strength which results from the categorization provided within this framework enhances our comprehension of how these dimensions interact. The term ‘width’ is used to conjure up within the mind of the reader a visualization of each of the three dimensions as stretched wide; all are filled with the work and/or life experiences which reflect the nature their specific dimension. In other words, the strength of Day et al. (2006)’s three-dimensional framework is understood in terms of its coverage; all aspects of one’s life can be attributed to one of these dimensions.

Alsup’s (2006) conceptualization of “situated identities” (p. 3) represents a means of capturing the ‘depth’ of experience. This conceptual framework positions teacher identity as how one’s intrapersonal individuality (self) - which includes one’s emotions, dispositions, beliefs, values, and ideology - engages with the current, past, and projected lived experiences. This engagement of the self with others and world systems shapes an identity which operates within chosen or ascribed roles, and subsequently reform as prompted by changing contexts. Changing contexts refers not only to teaching settings and environments (e.g. social, cultural, and political contexts), but also to additional sources of knowledge such as educational theories, concepts, and philosophies of knowledge that inform teachers’ epistemological stance regarding the profession. As the primary subject of this investigation, I must honor my positionality as educator who has moved between multiple communities of practice of the course of a ten-year career. The incorporation of Alsup’s notion of “situated identities” represents an effort to connect “the multiple subjectivities or understandings of self” (p. 55); a means of enabling teachers to build bridges between the discourses of each community. The very notion of ‘changing contexts’ transforms the model from one-dimensional to multi-dimensional, addressing experience over

space and time. To put it another way, I problematize Day et al. (2006)'s suggestion that one is capable of always understanding how the personal, professional, and situational dimensions of identity "interact". Initial acts of conducting autoethnography led to a discovery that the dimensions often overlapped in complex and sometimes even in contradictory ways. Subsequent introspection and further analyses revealed the complicated nature of changing contexts, many of which I was unaware had significant impacts on my identity. The addition of Alsup's contribution of "situated identities" supports the construction of deeper, more thorough analyses.

Teacher identity as it is used in this study, can be understood as the process of integrating the personal and professional sides of becoming and being a teacher. Teachers must make choices about how they navigate and negotiate many variables. The interaction between person and context, from which teachers' professional identity results, is manifested in teachers' job satisfaction, occupational commitment, self-efficacy, and teachers' motivation (Day, 2002). In noting issues that arise from attempts to understand teacher identity, Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) point out that the discourse on teacher identity must examine the role of self, emotion, stories, reflection, agency, and context in identity formation. This framework honors these principals, and is embedded with an assumption that identity is a subjective phenomenon. The framework supports my efforts of locating my authentic self.

Critical Orientation

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT), grew out a movement known as Critical Legal Studies (CLS) which "sprang up in the late 1960s when a number of legal scholars and activists around the nation realized that the heady gains of the Civil Rights era had stalled and indeed were being rolled back" (Delgado, 2003, p. 125). Collectively, the CLS movement argued that while

classical racism was outlawed, racism in more mundane forms continued in the law and in society that supported a White majority and their ideology, culture, and epistemology (Parker, 2004; as cited in Hernandez, 2013). Today, CRT is composed of a collection of activists and scholars interested in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power. CRT challenges the notion of meritocracy in the United States, using race and racism as lens in critiquing issues (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). Delgado and Stefancic (2001) explain the concept in further detail, noting:

The movement considers many of the same issues that the conventional civil rights and ethnic studies discourses take up, but places them in a broader perspective that includes economics, history, context, group – and self-interest, and even feelings and the unconscious. (p. 3)

Scholars in the field of education, such as Solórzano and Yosso (2002), extend upon the work of these early legal scholars, arguing that CRT advances a strategy to foreground the role of race and racism in education and works towards “the elimination of racism in education as part of a larger goal of opposing or eliminating other forms of subordination based on gender, class, sexual orientation, language, and national origin” (p. 25). Building upon this understanding, Delgado and Stefancic (200) highlight how modern CRT scholars in the field of education use CRT’s ideas to understand issues that include “school discipline and hierarchy, tracking, controversies over curriculum and history, and IQ and achievement testing” (p. 3). Delgado Bernal and Villalpando (2002) argue that education in the United States is founded on a Eurocentric epistemological perspective based on White privilege and American democratic ideals of meritocracy, objectivity, and individuality. They assert “This epistemological

perspective presumes that there is only one way of knowing and understanding the world, and it is the natural way of interpreting truth, knowledge, and reality” (p. 171).

Solórzano and Yosso (2002) identify five tenets of a CRT methodology: Placing race and its intersectionality with other forms of subordination at the center of research, using race in research to challenge the dominant scientific norms of objectivity and neutrality, having the research connected with social justice concerns and potential praxis with ongoing efforts in communities, making experiential knowledge central to the study, and linking this knowledge to other critical research and interpretive perspectives on race and racism. The final tenet emphasizes the importance of utilizing transdisciplinary perspectives that are based in other fields for enhancing an understanding of the effects of racism and other forms of discrimination on persons of color (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). They conclude, “Using critical race methodology confirms that we must look to experiences with and responses to racism, sexism, classism, and heterosexism in and out of schools as valid, appropriate, and necessary forms of data” (p. 37)

In sum, CRT serves as a tool for critical scholars who seek to expose and disrupt oppressive conditions within educational institutions. A critical race analysis allows for and enables researches to work towards the elimination of racism through understanding the multiple ways that minorities experience subordination, as defined by race, class, gender, and other forms of oppression (Huber, 2008). Delgado and Stefancic (2001) note that CRT distinguishes itself from other disciplines through its ‘activist’ dimension, clarifying that CRT “not only tries to understand our social situation, but to change it; it sets out not only to ascertain how society organizes itself along racial lines and hierarchies, but to transform it for the better” (p. 3)

Intersectionality

The concept of intersectionality originates from the work of Crenshaw (1989, 1991), a critical race and feminist theorist coined the term to describe the way different forms of discrimination and exclusion overlap and compound each other. Exclusion affects individuals and groups marked by multiple categories of difference - e.g., race, class, gender, religion, immigration status, sexual orientation, language (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991; King, 1988). In this regard, intersectionality was initially conceived as a way to present a reality about discrimination and exclusion that was previously hidden by conventional thinking. This reality is that inequality can be based on the interaction of multiple factors rather than just one. In Crenshaw's use, the concept of intersectionality represented a way to take into account not only the different inequalities, but also the interactions that occur between them.

Critical Race Theorists believe that “intersectionality” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 8), is the merging or meeting of our multiple social identities. Some of these identifiers come with privilege and some come with oppression. The notion of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989, 1993; King, 1988; Levine-Rasky, 2011), has been interpreted and discussed in various ways – e.g. as a theory, methodology, or framework. As a result, a number of definitions have been proposed by professionals from numerous academic disciplines. In a synthesis of the literature on the concept, Hankivsky (2014) provides clarity, postulating:

Intersectionality promotes an understanding of human beings as shaped by the interaction of different social locations (e.g., ‘race’/ethnicity, Indigeneity, gender, class, sexuality, geography, age, disability/ability, migration status, religion). These interactions occur within a context

of connected systems and structures of power (e.g., laws, policies, state governments and other political and economic unions, religious institutions, media). Through such processes, interdependent forms of privilege and oppression shaped by colonialism, imperialism, racism, homophobia, ableism and patriarchy are created. (p. 2)

In intersectionality theory, identity is experienced “not as composed of discrete attributes but as a subjective, even fragmented, set of dynamics (Levine-Rasky, 2011, p. 242). For example, gender is always ‘raced’ and race is always ‘gendered’. There are racialized differences within social class groups as there are social class differences within any racialized group. As such, identity and exclusion are therefore multiple and complex (Friedman, 1995); contingent upon social, political, and ideological contexts that produce and sustain them.

The terms of differentiation shift with time and political milieus. In this regard, an individual can experience both privilege and oppression at the same time, depending upon context. In sum, according to an intersectionality perspective, inequalities are never the result of single, distinct factors. Rather, they are the outcome of intersections of different social locations, power relations, and experience. Levine-Rasky (2011) explains, “Moreover, who one ‘is’ is not static; it is wholly relational to others, to culture, and to organizations in which one moves. Identity is elected and it is emergent in relation to power” (p. 242). This discussion of intersectionality is about the intersection of three or more characteristics. Single- and double-axis analyses have made important contributions to education. Nevertheless, analyses that consider the intersection of three or more characteristics more completely illuminate the complexity of lived experiences at crossroads of multiple identities and within systems of oppression and

privilege. Autoethnographic scholars have routinely identified and used their multiple standpoints to situate their stories to call out positions of privilege and expose moments of vulnerability

As a theoretical tool, intersectionality encourages individuals to examine the interconnectedness of their identity and look at ways in which they consciously or subconsciously emphasize or ignore certain aspects of identity. Intersectionality invites questions such as where, when, and in relation to whom individual and groups exercise power and privilege. The concept of intersectionality recognizes the interconnection among various types of institutionalized biases that may be experienced simultaneously. Such biases are associated with various forms of privilege and oppression. As a tool for analysis, intersectionality provides for flexible critical understandings of individuals and groups' lived experiences, reflecting the researcher's assumption that we are all products of a combinations of experiences and identities that are rooted in variety and socially constructed classifications of valuation.

Cultural Capital

In identifying social class, I draw upon the work of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002) pertaining to the concept of 'cultural capital'. Bourdieu was interested in the ways in which society is reproduced as well as how the dominant classes retain their possession of power (Gauntlett, 2011). Although contemporary theorists and researchers have not agreed on a single definition of this multi-faceted concept, cultural capital is generally understood as the ways in which people use cultural knowledges to undergird their place in the hierarchy of society (Gauntlett, 2011). Bourdieu (1977) conceptualized cultural capital as "the general cultural background, knowledge, dispositions, and skills that are passed on from one generation to another" (p. 490). More specifically, cultural capital represents "ways of talking, acting, modes

of style, moving, socializing, forms of knowledge, language practices, and values” (p. 490). As the word “capital” implies, cultural capital is an *asset* and can be used to acquire other kinds of assets, such as educational credentials, career placements and promotions, as well as financial gains.

Bourdieu (1986) theorized that it was cultural capital, more than the natural aptitude, which garners success in academic spaces. Cultural capital in a Bourdieuan framework exists in three interconnected forms or states: *embodied*, *objectified*, and *institutionalized*. Saraceno (2014) provides concise descriptions of each of these forms. *Embodied* cultural capital consists of “...both the consciously acquired and the passively ‘inherited’ features that characterize ways of being and feeling, such as language, tastes, patterns of communication and behaviour and so forth” (p. 4). One’s manners, habits, accent/dialect, etc. are examples of embodied cultural capital – discourses so habitually enacted that they are virtually invisible. It is acquired over time, through socialization and cannot be transmitted instantaneously (Bourdieu, 1986). *Objectified* cultural capital is more tangible than the embodied state, consisting of things or possessions owned or acquired by people – e.g. writings, paintings, monuments, instruments, etc. (Bourdieu, 1986). These cultural goods can be transmitted both for economic profit and for the purpose of “symbolically” conveying the cultural capital whose acquisition they facilitate (Saraceno, 2014). *Institutionalized* cultural capital manifests as academic credentials or qualifications (such as a college degree or medical license) that recognize and legitimate the embodied and objectified forms of cultural capital owned by a person. Saraceno points out that the institutional recognition process eases the conversion of cultural capital to economic capital “by serving as an experience-based model that sellers can use to describe their capital and buyers can use to describe their needs” (p. 4).

I add here that there exist two distinct categories of cultural capital: dominant and non-dominant. As the term dominant infers, this cultural capital corresponds to a type of resource that can eventually yield economic and/or social returns. It constitutes the cultural knowledge and skills of the high-status racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups of society

Critical Whiteness Studies

Taking ownership of my racist disposition warrants an exploration of my own racialization and its subsequent impact on my teacher identity. To be critical of Whiteness, according to Leonardo (2010), one must first *locate* it. The challenge, as evidenced above, is that Whiteness passes as ‘good values’ or a ‘universal human nature’ when in fact it is particular and partial. As a White male of the dominant American middle-class culture, the term “Whiteness” immediately conjures up images of a racial identity. Even an individual who seeks to problematize Whiteness - to understand its impacts and disrupt them – faces a challenge due to the complexity that characterizes the professional literature on Whiteness itself. In his text *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness*, George Lipsitz (2006) defines Whiteness “as the unmarked category against which difference is constructed”. He adds, “Whiteness never has to speak its name, never has to acknowledge its role as an organizing principle in social and cultural relations” (p. 1). Similarly, Frankenberg (1993) presents Whiteness as more than a racial identity, describing it as “a location of structural advantage, of race privilege” (p. 1).

A look at the wider literature reveals Whiteness has been conceptualized as a social construction (Leonardo, 2002, 2009, 2010), a platform (Frankenberg, 1993), an identity (Dyson, 1996), an ideology (Gusa, 2016), an institution (Dyson, 1996), a privilege (McIntosh, 1990; Lipsitz, 2006; Sleeter, 2005), an epistemology (Dwyer & Jones, 2000), and as an emotionality (Matias, 2016). In general, however, scholars in the field of critical Whiteness studies agree that

Whiteness is “intimately involved with issues of power and power differences between White and non-White people” (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1998, p. 4). The critical inquiry into Whiteness, which studies how Whites live and experience Whiteness, serves as an exploration, interrogation, and complication of the relations between White individuals, groups, and hegemony.

What these definitions do not address is how Whiteness is formed. Beginning to be able to understand and “track” Whiteness, as it is constructed socially and historically, allows us to think about the possibilities of revealing its various operations so as to challenge and renegotiate its meanings (Leonardo, 2010). In this regard, Babbs (1998) provides a description of Whiteness that provides an effective starting point from which to begin this investigation:

Like other racial categories, Whiteness is more than a classification of physical appearance; it is largely an invented construct blending history, culture, assumptions, and attitudes. From a descent of various European nationals there emerges in the United States the consensus of a single White race that, in principle, elides religious, socioeconomic, and gender differences among individual Whites to create a hegemonically privileged race category. (p. 10)

Babbs identifies the contexts in which Whiteness emerged through certain conditions and its effects, which implies (and reminds) the reader that Whiteness is not ‘real’, but instead a social construction. In addition, Babbs illustrates that Whiteness must be understood as more than a racial identity, acknowledging that in concealing its own internal differences, Whiteness secures power.

Reflective Teaching

Introduction

Reflective teaching is a complex, multi-dimensional phenomenon that in recent years has been at the center of educational discourse and research. That is, reflective teaching has become the emphasis of contemporary efforts in teacher education to bridge the gap between theory and practice; a means to make use of insider knowledge about teaching (Bailey et al., 1998; as cited in Jalilifar & Nattaq, 2013). According to Dewey (1964), reflection is an important tool for teaching because “it enables us to know what we are about when we act” (p. 211). Adler (2004) notes that the publication of Donald Schön’s *The Reflective Practitioner* in 1983 “...constituted a watershed event in teacher education that sparked immense interest in the image of the teacher as a thinker and knower” (p. 60). Since then, cultivating reflective practitioners has been the subject of countless books, journal articles, and dissertations in the field of education. In recent years, the concept of reflection has been widely used in a variety of different teacher education programs in order to help pre- and in-service teachers in the process of clarifying their ideas about their own teaching practices, and in considering and evaluating those ideas in the hope that they will develop the capacity to evaluate and improve their teaching practices (Allen & Casbergue, 1997; Bean & Stevens, 2002; Beattie, 1997; Clarke, 1994; Conway, 2001; Freese, 2006; Gilbert, 1994; Schön, 1983, 1987).

Despite this scholarly attention, it proves difficult to define reflective teaching due to a lack of clear-cut definitions in the professional literature on the concept. Terms such as ‘reflective teaching’, ‘reflective practice’, ‘teacher as researcher’, and ‘teacher as reflective practitioner’ are now widely used in a variety of educational contexts and are informed by diverse theoretical frameworks. The term ‘reflective practice’ carries multiple meanings that

range from the idea of professionals engaging in solitary introspection to that of engaging in critical dialogue with others.

As a construct, reflection “simply means thinking about something,” but for some, “it is a well-defined and crafted practice that carries very specific meaning and associated action” (Loughran, 2002, p. 33; as cited in Fat’hi & Behzadpour, 2011, p. 242). Boud, Keogh, and Walker (1985) view reflection as “intellectual and affective activities in which individuals engage to explore their experiences in order to achieve new understandings and appreciations (p. 19). For Hatton and Smith (1995), reflection is “deliberate thinking about action with a view to its improvement” (p. 35). Atkins and Murphy (1995) describe reflection as a complex and deliberate process of thinking about and interpreting experience in order to learn from it. It also is conceptualized as self-study; an intentional and systematic inquiry into one’s own practice (Dinkelman, 2003).

What links these different conceptualizations is the role of meaning making at a personal level as well as a sense of reformulating and personalizing assumptions, beliefs and theories based on experience. In general, reflective practice is understood as the process of leaning through and from experience towards gaining new insights of self and/or practice (Finlay, 2008). This often involves examining assumptions of everyday practice. It also tends to involve the individual practitioner in being self-aware and critically evaluating their own responses to situations. The point is to recapture these experiences and mull them over critically in order to gain new understandings and as a result improve future practice. Beyond these broad areas of agreement, however, contention and difficulty remain. There is debate about the extent to which practitioners should focus on themselves as individuals rather than the larger social context. There are also questions about how, when, where, and why reflection should take place.

Although reflection is defined and interpreted by different academics and researchers in various manners, all accept that it is a desirable attitude and practice to improve one's practice and learning (Cole, 1997; Freese, 1999). In short, through reflection, people recall, consider, and evaluate their experience, usually in relation, to improve their practice and to deepen their understanding of that experience (Richards, 1990). Teachers engage in various forms of reflective activities for different goals. The origins of these various goals can be traced to the work of Dewey (1933, 1938) and Schön (1983; 1987).

John Dewey: Reflection-on-action

John Dewey (1933) is often credited as one of the first to highlight the importance of reflection in the professional development of teachers. Dewey (1933) initially defines reflection as the “active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends” (p. 9). Dewey's observation of teachers' routines and reflection actions in teaching “highlighted the importance of teachers reflecting systematically upon their working contexts, resources, and actions and applying what they learned from reflection in their everyday and long-term decision making” (Burton, 2009, p. 298). Dewey also argued that reflective thinking moved people away from routine thinking/action (guided by tradition or external authority) towards reflective action (involving careful, critical consideration of taken-for-granted knowledge). To recapitulate, teachers who act routinely accept their present circumstances without questioning whereas reflective teachers think about issues in their own teaching practice and ponder how those problems are related to their educational and social contexts. This distinction is noteworthy because routine action does not meet the needs of the complex nature of teaching in the modern

era. Dewey (1974; as cited in Weinbaum et. al, 2004, p. 150) points out that it is reflection which:

...emancipates us from merely impulsive and routine activity...
 enables us to direct our activities with foresight and to plan
 according to ends-in-view, or purposes of which we are aware. It
 enables us to act in deliberate and intentional fashion to know what
 we are about when we act... (p. 212)

In addition, Dewey identified three vital teaching qualities that enable teachers to be reflective: open-mindedness, responsibility, and wholeheartedness. Al Riyami (2015) defines these constructs as follows:

...open-mindedness... means that the teachers should listen to all
 perspectives. Responsibility refers to the teachers being aware of
 all of the consequences of their actions and wholeheartedness
 refers to having these qualities at the centre (sp.) of their being and
 actions. (p. 47).

To clarify, through this lens reflection is not a point of view with end products, but instead a process of planned exploration and examination of the means (process and context) associated with reflection (Farrell, 2014). The means associated with reflection must also be accompanied with a disposition to reflect, or a willingness to actively challenge the comfortable and often taken for granted parts of our professional lives. In summation, Dewey moved reflection beyond the value of thinking for thinking's sake, to the value of thinking (critically and scientifically) inform action – that is, in a deliberate and intentional fashion (Dimova & Loughran, 2009).

Donald Schön: Reflection-in-action

Dewey's ideas provided a basis for the concept of 'reflective practice'. Building upon Dewey's conceptualization of reflection as a purposeful activity, Donald Schön (1983, 1987) furthered the notion by describing and distinguishing between two main forms of reflection used by professionals: 'reflection-on-action' (after-the-event thinking) and 'reflection-in-action' (thinking while doing). According to Schön (1987), reflective practitioners "exhibit a kind of knowing-in-practice, most of which is tacit" (p. 30) and engage in reflection-in-action when they reflect during an experience and make changes during an action. He argues that "some of the most interesting examples of, reflection-in-action occur in the midst of a performance" and can be described by phrases such as "thinking on your feet" (Schön, 1983, p. 54; as cited in Çimer, Çimer, & Vekli, 2013, p. 135), suggesting that we can think about something while doing it. In other words, practitioners engaging in reflection-in-action stop in the midst of action, make necessary adjustments, and alter their methods to improve their practice. In both types of reflection, professionals aim to connect with their feelings and attend to relevant theory. They seek to build new understandings to shape their action in the unfolding situation.

For Schön (1987), reflection-in-action was the core of 'professional artistry', a concept he contrasted with the 'technical-rationality' demanded by the still dominant positivist paradigm "whereby problems are solvable through the rigorous application of science" (Finlay, 2008, p. 3). That is, Schön argued that professional practice is complex, unpredictable, and messy. In order to meaningfully navigate this context, professionals must do more than follow set procedures. They draw on both practical experience and theory as they "think on their feet" and improvise, acting both intuitively and creatively. Both reflection-in and on-action allows professionals to revise, modify, and refine their expertise. Schön's work has been hugely influential in the way it has

been applied to practice and professional training and education. Many researchers have advanced his thinking, leading to a new array of definitions, formats, etc.

Summary of Reflective Teaching

Zeichner and Liston (1996) emphasize five key features of reflective teaching. According to the authors, the reflective teacher:

1. examines, frames, and attempts to solve the dilemmas of classroom practice;
2. is aware of and questions the assumptions and values he or she brings to teaching;
3. is attentive to the institutional and cultural contexts in which he or she teaches;
4. takes part in curriculum development and is involved in school change efforts; and
5. takes responsibility for his or her own professional development.

In summation, reflection is a process of self-examination and self-evaluation in which educators engage to improve their professional practices. Reflective thinking leads educators to act deliberately and intentionally rather than randomly and reactively. Shandomo (2010) notes, “Without reflection, teachers unquestioningly believe that students can accurately interpret their actions as intended; furthermore, teachers may continue to plan and teach on the basis of unexamined assumptions” (p. 104). As a result, such teachers often fall into the habit of justifying what they do as ‘common sense’. Brookfield (2004) points out that “unexamined common sense is a notoriously unreliable guide to action” (p. 4).

Critical Reflection

As the previous section demonstrates, there exist various types and definitions of reflective practice. Calls for a more critical, reflexive exploration of the very nature of reflective

practice have led to research from which the ‘sister concepts’ of critical reflection and reflexivity emerge. Reflection itself is not, by definition, an inherently *critical* process. The critical paradigm of research aims at understanding, uncovering, illuminating, and/or transforming how educational aims, dilemmas, tensions, and hopes are related to social divisions and power differentials (Griffiths, 2009). Critical reflection is viewed as a more thorough-going form of reflection through its use of Critical Race Theory (CRT), to frame the reflective process (Brookfield, 1995). Through a lens of the critical paradigm of qualitative research, reflection involves problem identification or framing, reflection on the basis of that identification (perhaps historical, social, or cultural in nature), and action planning to address the perceived problem (Brookfield, 1995; Shandomo, 2010).

Critical reflective practice is complex process, requiring introspection about how one’s beliefs, assumptions, and experiences influence perceptions of self and the social world (Shandomo, 2010). As described in my introduction, although one’s racial identity is deeply contextualized and rooted in the social and historical contexts in which it is developed, most White teachers do not see themselves as being raced or having a racial identity (Sleeter, 1995). Further, White people in the United States are raised to avoid talking about race altogether so as not to be seen as impolite or racist. Instead, we are conditioned to see ourselves as racially neutral (the norm) and to see non-White people as being raced or “Other” (LeCompte & McCray, 2002).

Critical reflection involves “taking in the broader historical, socio-political, and moral context of schooling” (Jay & Johnson, 2002, p. 79). This means that teachers need to relate aspects of teaching and what is going on in the class to broader social, cultural and political domains (Al Riyami, 2015). In other words, critical reflection requires teachers to be reflective

with an understanding and openness/ability to challenge and confront complex issues of power and politics in their schools and community as well (Ghaye & Ghaye, 1999 as cited in Çimer, Çimer & Vekli, 2013). For those who adhere to the tenants of critical reflection, reflection on its own tends to “remain at the level of relatively undistruptive changes in techniques or superficial thinking” (Fook, White & Gardner, 2006, p. 9). What a simple reflective approach lacks, according to Fook (2007), is “a detailed analysis of how power operates, and in particular the role of personal power in relation to social and structural contexts and constraints” (p. 443). In contrast, critical reflection involves attending to discourse and social and political analysis; it seeks to enable transformative social action and change. For Fook (2006, as cited in Finlay, 2010, p. 10), critical reflection:

...enables an understanding of the way (socially dominant) assumptions may be socially restrictive, and thus enables new, more empowering ideas and practices. Critical reflection thus enables social change beginning at individual levels. Once individuals become aware of the hidden power of ideas they have absorbed unwittingly from their social contexts, they are then free to make choices on their own terms.

In line with the catalytic potential of critical reflective practice described by Fook, Mezirow (1990) considers the practice to be a precursor for transformative learning experiences, which he describes as the attainment of powerful new awareness’ that lead to changes in personal understandings and potentially behavior as well.

Pulling it all together, Shandomo (2010) provides a comprehensive definition of critical reflection as “the process by which adults identify the assumptions governing their actions,

locate the historical and cultural origins of the assumptions, question the meaning of assumptions, and develop alternative ways of acting [Cranton, 1996]” (p. 101). Brookfield (2004) adds that part of the critical reflective process is to challenge the prevailing social, political, cultural, or professional ways of acting. Through the process of critical reflection, the practitioner comes to interpret and create new knowledge and actions from their experiences.

Fook, White and Gardner (2006) provide a framework for critical reflective practice, noting that it involves:

1. a process (cognitive, emotional, experiential) of examining assumptions (of many different types and levels) embedded in actions or experience;
2. a linking of these assumptions with many different origins (personal, emotional, social, cultural, historical, political);
3. a review and re-evaluation of these according to relevant (depending on context, purpose, etc.) criteria; a reworking of concepts and practice based on this re-evaluation. (p. 12)

This model of critical reflection serves as the foundation upon which the theoretical tools of the critical paradigm will be leveraged, as I will engage in the critical praxis of this autoethnographic inquiry.

Reflexivity

A key concept giving momentum to the idea of reflective practice involving both personal reflection and social critique is that of ‘reflexivity’. Reflexivity, or a ‘turning back on itself’ (Steier, 1991), has been defined in various ways. Taylor and White’s version of reflexivity (2000) emphasizes the ability to look both inwards and outwards to recognize the connections

with social and cultural understandings. According to Denzin (1997), reflexivity is “an important motion, back and forth, between one’s actions and how those implicate one in social phenomena” (p. 48). Denzin continues, maintaining that reflexivity can “effectively illuminate how the author is both product and producer of culture, how the author’s very (in) actions create and sustain complex social phenomena, including how s/he understands identity, power, and culture” (p. 47).

Danielewicz (2001; as cited in Gay & Kirkland, 2003, p. 182) provides a more comprehensive definition:

Reflexivity is an act of self-conscious consideration that can lead people to a deepened understanding of themselves and others, not in the abstract, but in relation to specific social environments... [and] foster a more profound awareness ... of how social contexts influence who people are and how they behave... It involves a person's active analysis of past situations, events, and products, with the inherent goals of critique and revision for the explicit purpose of achieving an understanding that can lead to change in thought or behavior. (pp. 155-156)

In general, reflexivity can be understood as an explicit self-consciousness about a researcher’s social, political and value positions in relation to how these might have influenced the design, execution and interpretation of the theory, data and conclusions (Griffiths, 1999). Reflexive practitioners engage in more than traditional self-reflection, instead reflecting critically on the impact of their own background, assumptions, positioning, feelings, and behavior while also attending to the impact of the wider organizational, discursive, ideological and political context.

The concepts of reflection, critical reflection, and reflexivity are often confused and are at times wrongly assumed to be interchangeable. Finlay and Gough (2003, p. ix) find it helpful to think of these constructs as forming a continuum with reflection – ‘thinking about’ – on one end and the more immediate and dynamic process of reflexivity on the other end.

Fook (2007) establishes a clear connection between critical reflection and reflexivity, asserting:

Using the idea of reflexivity then, critical reflection is a way of researching personal practice or experience in order to develop our understandings of ourselves as knowers or makers of knowledge. This in turn helps us make specific connections between ourselves as individuals and our broader social, cultural and structural environment, by understanding how our ideas, beliefs and assumptions might be at least partially determined by our social contexts. (p. 444)

Critical Consciousness

Critical reflection, and the reflexivity which emerges from effective participation in this process, are vital components of Freire’s (1970) notion of “conscientization” (p. 17). This conscientization, also termed ‘critical consciousness’ can be described as the social process of questioning one’s assumptions about reality (Freire, 1973, 2008) and active participation in the critique of knowledge production (Ladson Billings, 1995). The obstacles that stand in the way of this vague construct are the very reason for the sheer diversity of definitions present within the literature in the field of education; critical consciousness has been described as a tool, framework, a state of mind, journey, an awakening, and a continuum (Gatimu, 2009). Similarly, it is raised, facilitated, journeyed into, something people must have, and brought out

(McDonough, 2015). Scholars frame critical consciousness as knowledge (Sleeter et al, 2004) and dispositions (Houser, 2008), but less often as *actions*.

In this work, I position critical consciousness similar to that of contemporary notions of identity with regards to its ongoing nature. From this, it is inferred here that critical consciousness encompasses a continuous process that can also be viewed a product at any given moment in time. Similar to how the contextual nature and situatedness of identity negates a point of view which places the locus of control as solely on the individual (carrying the assumption that any specific identity can be achieved or held as one would a possession) to attempt engagement in the process of critical consciousness for a predetermined period of time defeats the very purpose of its nature. A closer examination of what critical consciousness means serves to clarify my position.

Having its conceptual roots in the critical theory of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (Freire, 1973) critical consciousness posits that the thinking subject does not exist in isolation but, rather, in relationship to others in the world. Freire (1998) would later describe critical consciousness as an “unfinished requirement of the human condition”, comparing it to a path which we have to follow in order to “deepen our awareness of the world, of facts, of events, of the demands of human consciousness to develop our capacity for epistemological curiosity” (p. 55). In line with the sentiment shared by Gay and Kirkland (2003), this curiosity takes the form of a disposition to engage in courageous conversations about racism and social injustices, to appreciate cultural differences, and accept the need to be reflective in our personal beliefs and professional practices. Shor (1992; as cited in Austin & Hickey, 2007, p. 21) sheds additional light on the concept, suggesting that ‘conscientization’ relates to:

Habits of thought, reading, writing, and speaking which go beneath surface meaning, first impressions, dominant myths, official pronouncements, traditional clichés, received wisdom, and mere opinions, to understand the deep meaning, root causes, social context, ideology, and personal consequences of any action, event, object, process, organization, experience, text, subject matter, policy, mass media, or discourse. (p. 129)

Freire (2002) adds further detail through his characterization of critical consciousness as questioning, reflecting, voicing, and taking action. The development of critical consciousness involves a reflective awareness of the differences in power and privilege and the inequalities that are embedded in social relationships – an act that Freire (1970/1993) terms “reading the world” – and the fostering of a reorientation of perspective towards a commitment to social justice. In the words of Freire (2002), critical consciousness is “learning to perceive social, political, and economic status contradictions and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality” (p. 17). Such a consciousness serves as a form of agency “that leads to liberation of individuals and groups and the process by which individuals and communities develop a critical understanding of their social reality through praxis – reflection plus action” (Freire, 1970, 1973, 1984; as cited in Freebersyser, 2014, p. 150). Praxis, in this case, can be understood as a form of critical self-reflection and subsequent action. The development of this type of consciousness, a process that Freire calls “conscientization” – is both cognitive and affective and leads to engaged discourse, collaborative problem-solving, and a “rehumanization” of human relationships (Freire, 1970/1993). In summation, critical consciousness is in itself more than just a developmental

process through which an individual develops a critical awareness of social structures; it is the power to change an existing reality into a new and improved reality.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this autoethnographic research is to more fully understand my teaching identity. This study represents an effort to understand the subjectivities that have shaped my experiences and the meaning I have derived from them. Central to this research will be the critical exploration of the multiple personal and professional selves and the roles they play in the formation of my teaching self. Through this inquiry, I seek to highlight the invisible social, cultural, historical, and political forces that have shaped my sense of self. Within the context of this study, the intersectionality of such forces – gender, race, ethnicity, education, nationality, socioeconomic status, and geography – are viewed as dependent variables in the equation of my identity, shifting as I navigate and negotiate different aspects of my identities. Similarly, I seek to understand how my positionality as a male, haole ‘transplant’ living and teaching in the context of the historical framework of contemporary Hawai‘i, has impacted the manner by which I have negotiated my personal beliefs, values, assumptions, perceptions, and interpretations and subsequently my teacher identity.

The following questions guide this inquiry process:

1. What are the significant social, cultural, historical, and political forces in Hawai‘i that have shaped my personal and professional identity formation?
2. How does my positionality as a haole “transplant” in Hawai‘i impact my personal beliefs, values, assumptions, and ultimately the development of a critical consciousness?

3. How do my multiple identities interface with the ethnographic characteristics of the schools where I have taught?
4. How do my personal and professional roles influence my teaching identity?
5. What can we learn from my experience that can be used to by others in order to become successful teachers in Hawai'i?

This study stems from the researcher/self's need to find closure with certain traumatic events from the past. After a decade of trajectory within the teaching profession, I found myself incapacitated. No longer able to see a path ahead, I had grinded to a complete halt. I can describe this feeling most accurately by comparing it to a wave of cognitive dissonance, which had seemingly swept over my being; an uncomfortable state of tension emerging from the possession of inconsistent and contradictory thoughts, beliefs, and attitudes. I felt guilty and angry. Frustrated and enthusiastic. Confident yet uncertain. Hopeful but doubtful. Overshadowing all of these states of being were consistently present, the feelings of shame.

In *The White Album* (1990), Joan Didion famously wrote "We tell ourselves stories in order to live". I needed a story; a sense of consistency to my thoughts. I needed a permanent explanation about who I was in the world and how the world works. In this regard, the stories I told myself had begun to fail. I visualize these stories as the rocks, dirt, mulch, and debris that we use to secure our stories – our "truths" – safely in the unconscious mind. When lived-experiences contradict our stories, "leaks" emerge in the form of cognitive dissonance. Ultimately, the volume of contradictory experiences led to the transformation from "leaks" into "flows".

My career path did not resemble a symbolic slope upward or a steady progression toward a single goal. This, I later realized, was a preconceived notion of what I thought success should look like. The logic behind this expectation appeared rational: with experience comes mastery,

which is represented by continuous improvement and a high level of performance. Yet when I visualized success, the possession of specific skills or competencies did not come to mind; I had already owned many of these through my experience as both a teacher and doctoral student. This sentiment was not driven by arrogance; a self-awareness of my genuine passion for personal and professional growth ensured these. Instead, success was visualized as the embodiment of certain *feelings*. As a success, I would be confident, secure, and satisfied. These were the feelings that transcended the professional and enhanced the personal as well. Rather than an upward slope, I saw ebbs and flows, periods of immense growth and enthusiasm intermixed with moments of crisis and frustration. Although they represented only a small fraction of my career, these “moments” of crisis predominated most aspects of conscious thought – linked together like a repetition compulsion of sorts. These incidents were emotionally charged, explosive, and deeply painful moments. Despite knowing my career successes, I did not feel confident, secure, or satisfied... And I felt like I *deserved* to own those feelings.

Anger proved to be a strong motivator for the decision to stop the endless rationalization. I was fed up with consistently accepting blame for all conflict on myself fueled by my internal feelings which bellowed incompetence, unfairness, and disobedience on behalf of others. I began to question myself. How did I get to this point? Why is it acceptable for co-workers to curse at and threaten me? Why is the misguided aggression of manipulated or manipulative parents more valid than the truth? Why were administrators always correct, even when they clearly were not? Why do I work so excessively yet feel so inadequate? Why is it okay to be taken advantage of by others? Answers were not readily apparent, but emotions certainly were. I felt like a doormat. I was a character who existed in the stories of others; my sense of personal agency was to a

significant extent at the whim of the brushstroke of another. Their narratives took over my story even though they were not mine.

Further complicating these sense-making efforts was the diversity, which characterized the multiple contexts where I had served. I was left with a flood of questions and no certain answers. *Why did “this” happen? Where do I place the blame? Were there other factors involved? What does this mean - and to who? Why? How effective am I as a teacher? Am I good person?* I did not possess much in the way of an ability to sustain anger; my upbringing led to an internalization of anger as negative. When I expressed anger at home, negative consequences followed. Anger directed at me was generally a representation of my own inadequacies – it was my fault for not acting or behaving the ‘right’ way. But I had finally had enough. I learned to embrace my anger and in turn felt encouraged to locate my voice and to use it.

It was time to narrate my own story.

These moments of crisis were the catalyst for an in-depth personal/political investigation of self, others, and race/ethnicity/culture. I needed a method that would allow me to write my stories and express my emotion; a method that valued my stories yet encouraged systematic reflection; a method that complimented my scholarly writing with the artistic freedom necessary to prevent the censorship of my own rationalization. This investigation demands research that “carries its meaning in its entire text”, research that “acknowledges meaning in the reading” (Richardson, 1994, p. 924). It demands qualitative research. As a qualitative research methodology, autoethnography provided a comfort zone where I was able to explore my emotional grief and engage in scholarly reflection using narrative.

Qualitative Methods

While both qualitative and quantitative research are useful and necessary approaches for exploring our world, qualitative research lends itself to this autoethnographic exploration of my teacher identity. The mantra of autoethnographers is simple (though not necessarily easy): “*Show, don’t tell!*” Autoethnographers work to reveal and to demonstrate, to evoke and to show, how their experience unfolds in this complex human lifeworld we all inhabit.

Through my work, I seek to “...describe, decode, translate, and otherwise come to terms with the meaning” (Van Maanen, 1979, p. 520; as cited in Williams, 2014, p. 64) of the subjectivities that shaped my experience as a “transplant” teacher in Hawai‘i. My dissertation takes the form of an investigation into the changes in identity and understanding of self that occurred when living through moments of existential crisis. It is also an investigation of self-creation, as I feel my research actively reshapes me as I proceed. This research represents a journey towards an unknown and undefined ending. At its core, this study represents a teacher’s attempt to make sense of the world and his place in it. I seek to make meaning rather than to prove, to uncover rather than to validate. While useful for providing an understanding of the overarching facets social life, quantitative research is less adept at accounting for or describing the particular, the micro, and the situated elements of our lives. The purpose of my study reflects the unpredictable, dynamic, and messy nature of lived-experience and emotion; the ebbs and flows of my career cannot be accurately calculated, quantified, or generalized.

The qualitative research paradigm is rooted in the core belief that individuals assemble their own realities through their interactions with the world (Merriam, 1998). The qualitative paradigm challenges traditional, positivist epistemologies about whose knowledge is privileged and heard and whose voices are silenced or marginalized. The qualitative researcher’s interests

are grounded in how people construct, interpret, and make meaning of their lived experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Merriam, 2009). The qualitative researcher seeks answers to the *how* of experience. Understanding personal and interpersonal experience, understanding subjective experience, making meaning of experience, recognizing and analyzing the relationship between researchers and research subjects, exploring the setting, and using the research as a research instrument are part and parcel of the qualitative experience. As such, the qualitative approach positions knowledge as context-bound, partial, contingent, and constituted in and mediated by discourse (Bochner, 2001). Jones, Adams and Ellis, (2016) explain, “Qualitative research treats humans as patterned but not fully predictable beings whose thought practices are internally closed off from others [Peters, 1999] and embraces the idea that we are creatures who are never fully and completely knowable, even to ourselves [Mead, 1962]” (p. 27).

Although there is not one agreed upon set of criteria that encompass all qualitative research, there are several factors that most agree are inherent in a qualitative study. These include: an emphasis on the importance of conducting research in a natural setting (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), an eye toward an understanding of participants’ perspectives (Merriam, 2009), an assumption that it is important for researchers to subjectively and emphatically know the perspectives of the participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), and a working knowledge that questions and theories are likely to emerge after data collection, thus are not predetermined (Patton, 2002; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Because qualitative research is oriented toward understanding the natural world, it is highly interpretive in nature, reflecting the messiness of lived experience and emotions.

Different qualitative traditions incorporate and analyze the subjective aspects of human life differently. My study will attempt to communicate an account, through story, about

particular people, places, and periods of time. I will approach the ‘characters’ and ‘context’ of this story through “ethnographic eyes” (Frank, 1999). My aim is to explore the complex interplay of events and relationships as they unfold in a dynamic and unpredictable set of circumstances. The outcome is a unique and idiosyncratic example of people in real-world situations illustrating how abstract ideas and theories play out in social life. However, this research extends beyond the description of practices and performances, critically examining how knowledge is shaped by the beliefs and values of the individuals involved and the communities to which they belong, including the researcher himself.

Narrative Inquiry

“Narrative imagining” – story – is a deeply human activity possessed with both ontological and epistemological implications in human experience and existence (Lewis, 2010). As humans, our lives are shaped by the stories woven through our experiences; we make sense of the world and our lives through our stories (Ellis, 2004). Narrative is fundamental to being human, a structure for organizing our knowledge and experience (Bruner, 1996). Narrative constitutes the primary process by which human experience is made meaningful. Polkinghorne (1988) explains:

Our lives are ceaselessly intertwined with narrative, with stories that we tell and hear told, with stories that we dream or imagine or would like to tell. [. . .] We live immersed in narrative. Recounting and reassessing the meanings of our past actions, anticipating the outcomes of our future projects, situating ourselves at the intersection of several stories not yet completed (p. 160).

Polkinghorne's sentiment implies that humans have a symbiotic relationship with story in that we are both informed by story and formed by story. This relationship positions "narrative understanding" at the center of meaning making. The role of narrative in the meaning making process alludes to its primary role in the construction and maintenance of self-identity. Putting it all together, we are then, simply, the assembled stories that we tell about ourselves and the stories that are told about us by others. But we also have the power to renegotiate our identity by altering these stories.

At the heart of inquiry is the asking of questions. Thus, inquiry can be understood to begin with doubt. The interpretative nature of the research questions which frame this study suggest just that: doubt. The stories I had told myself and those which were told me had failed to generate a cohesive structure. Hendry (2010) posits "Narrative as inquiry is grounded in the doubt that is essential to creating and re-creating" (p. 73).

The research methodology I used in this study springs from narrative inquiry, which is an influential research methodology in education. Narrative inquiries, in general, show people in the process of figuring out what to do, how to live, and what their struggles mean (Ellis & Bochner, 2006). In describing narrative inquiry as a research methodology, Clandinin and Connelly (1990) draw from the philosophy of John Dewey, who described lived experience as both personal and social, (1929, 1934, 1938, as cited in Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The authors' posit that "humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives" (p. 2). The study of narrative, then, is "the study of the ways human experience the world" (p. 2). This research focuses on capturing lived experience from the perspective of those who live it and uncovering multiple perspectives on the phenomena under investigation. These researchers carefully explore identity landscapes to capture the experience of those that live there (Clandinin

& Connelly, 1995). That is, to understand others we must consider them not only as individuals and their experiences as individuals, but also how those fit into a social context that includes interactions with other people (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Lewis (2013) articulates the value of conducting narrative inquiry – as it pertains to my specific study - particularly well:

Narrative is fundamental to being human and if we are mindful in our living narratively, we may, through story, discover much about human being. Such narrative discoveries do not lead to some object TRUTH about the human experience; rather, they open up a multitude of human *truths* that are, albeit messy, far richer and more informative in both their complexity and simplicity. (para. 1)

Dewey also asserted that part of experience is characterized by a sense of continuity in that one's experience grows out of other experiences, and the new experience will grow into further experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Clandinin and Connelly propose a strategy for inquiry that embraces this idea of experiential continuity by identifying a three-dimensional research framework placing temporality (past, present, and future), sociality (social and personal elements), and place (context/location) on each of the three axes. This three-dimensional framework can serve as a structure for considering and analyzing narrative data, as well as offer a process for reporting research results (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Narrative inquiry, then, is presenting – as a story – the study of experience, in which the researcher inquires “inward and outward, backward and forward,” into the past, present, and future of experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 50). In doing this, narrative inquirers deepen their understanding of the narrative, the experience it represents, and the phenomenon they are investigating.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) developed the narrative inquiry process that aligns most closely with the work I have done here. Their narrative inquiry has a meta-analytical quality, in which the researcher must continually reflect on both the subject and process of the research itself. Their descriptions of narrative inquiry bring to mind a profound memory from the frequent visits to New York City with my father as a young boy. Of all the sights and sounds to take in, I would often become fixated on the department of public works employees who repaired and maintained the roads with their loud construction tools. Some potholes were heavily worked and reworked due to the sheer volume of humanity present in the city. My father often explained how the dark patches of fresh asphalt represented rehabilitated patches of road; those were the “good” sections, the “strongest” portions of the roadway. I perceived just the opposite: those dark patches of asphalt represented what were once the weakest spots. There was something incredibly intriguing about that type of exposure; about possessing simultaneous knowledge about what you once *were* and what you could *be*. These patches would never completely fade, leaving in the final product a record of motion and transformation. The narrative inquiry methodology developed by Clandinin and Connelly (2000) mimics this sense of transparency. It accounted for the structure and attitude that I brought to the notion of research.

Influences of the Poststructuralist Movement

Poststructuralism, and the more disseminated postmodern cultural developments to which it has contributed, are often considered the natural home to narrative inquiry (Clandinin, 2016). This is because poststructuralist theory, in particular the work of Foucault (1972, 1977, 1994), focuses significant attention on the linguistic and narrative structure of knowledge (Clandinin, 2016; Clandinin & Rosick, 2007). The aim of a poststructuralist perspective, as it is used here, is to “conceptualize the relationship between language, social institutions and individual

consciousness” (Weedon, 1987, p. 19). For poststructuralist thinkers who draw upon the work of Foucault, the possibility of a universal truth, which contributes to and privileges any single cultural tradition, does not exist. Instead, the representations of truths are constructed within discourses, which are continuously amended, transformed, and critiqued. The Foucauldian concept of discourse is complex, referring to more than a “mere intersection of things and words” (Foucault, 1972, p. 48). For the purpose of this chapter, discourse can be understood to describe language (both spoken and symbolic) that communicates meaning in a context. While the full story of the development of contemporary poststructuralist thought is beyond the scope of this section as it is positioned in this chapter, a description of the two general premises which underpin this sensibility serve to connect poststructuralism with the genre of narrative inquiry as it is used in this study.

A connection between the paradigm of poststructuralism and the genre of narrative inquiry emerges within the concept of identity. Poststructuralist lenses tend to view identity as inherently unstable, fluid, discontinuous, fragmented and in-process, constantly being reconstituted in discourse each time we think or speak (Davey, 2010). The term “subjectivity” is used by poststructural theorists to refer to the concept of identity in order to emphasize the contingent nature of identity. Poststructural theorists share fundamental assumptions about language, meaning, and subjectivity. Weedon (1997) explains “Meanings are socially produced and constituted within language; thus, language constructs our sense of ourselves, our subjectivity” (p. 19). According to Foucault, we form ourselves through narrative by telling others about ourselves and our experiences. Creating one’s identity, is for Foucault, the *discourse* of experience –not solely the experience itself. It is through sharing stories for others that we take part in constructing of selves (Zembylas, 2003a). Poststructuralist views attempts to

understand identity as inextricably connected with the social dynamics of power filtered through language. Zembylas (2003a, p. 221) argues that “identity is formed in this shifting space where narratives of subjectivity meet the narratives of culture” (p. 221). Day et al. (2006, p. 613; as cited in Davey, 2013, p. 29) provide another way of explaining this, asserting that identity is formed “in the space between the ‘structure’ (of the relations between power and status) and ‘agency’ (in the influence which we and others can have); and it is the interaction between these which influences how teachers see themselves, i.e. their personal and professional identities”.

Narrative inquiry seeks to examine experience with an eye to identifying new possibilities within that experience (Clandinin, 2016). Because meaning is obscured by singular, fixed belief systems, poststructuralism seeks to recover suppressed meanings through a process of questioning known as deconstructionism (Derrida, 1978; White, 1990). In doing so, multiple discourses are elevated as meaningful. Drawing on this paradigm, narrative practices affirm the idea that people’s lives and relationships are shaped by the “stories” that they and their surrounding communities create in order to give meaning to their experience. To work with a narrative worldview is to seek “not to privilege specific models, theories, or taken for granted assumptions about human nature... [but to] remain curious and questioning about how people construct their lives and tell their stories” (Speedy, 2000, p. 365). As a mode of analyses within the field of narrative inquiry, poststructuralism shifts attention “from individualism to subjectivity, from text to discursive practices, and from signifier to signifying practices. Its focus is on how language works, in whose and what interests, on what cultural sites and why” (Kelly, 1997, p. 19). Narrative inquiry that engages with a poststructuralist stance “is aware of narrative’s social positioning as discourses and the problematic of subjectivity and meaning” (Squire, Andrews & Tamboukou, 2008, p. 9).

Autoethnography

Introduction

As a tool within the qualitative toolbox, autoethnography proves the most appropriate choice to explore and examine the politics of identity and cultural difference, the constructed nature of reality/knowledge, the relationship between the researcher and the subject, the what, when, why, and how of participant and/or researcher's experiences, knowledge, and practices. As the researcher *and* subject of this qualitative body of work, I have adopted an autoethnographic lens to bring to light the evolution of my teacher identity. As an emerging qualitative research methodology with a spectrum of definitions and approaches reflecting diverse epistemological assumptions, it proves helpful to begin by shining the investigative light on the roots of this methodology. (Adams & Holman Jones, 2011; Ellis, 2004; Jensen-Hart & Williams, 2010). While it was originally used as a term to describe cultural studies of one's own people (Hayano, 1979), the label "autoethnography" today refers to an autobiographical genre of writing and research that examines the dialectics of subjectivity and culture (Ellis & Bochner, 2000).

Breaking the term down into its composite parts – *auto* and *ethnography* – provides clarity. Autoethnography has its roots in the qualitative research branch of ethnography. Schwandt (2003) posits that the term autoethnography generally refers to "a particular form of writing that seeks to unite ethnography [looking outward at a world beyond one's own] and autobiographical [gazing inward for a story of one's self] intentions" (p. 13). In this sense, autoethnography has been described as a form of "self-ethnographic" work (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Ethnography is the study of social interactions, practices and events. The study is done as

fieldwork: the ethnographer observes and participates in the everyday practices of the group of people that is studied. The observed social expressions, what people do and say, is described, and to some extent interpreted and assigned meaning (Geertz 1998; Hammersley & Atkins, 1989; Hughes, 1994). Ethnographers essentially turn themselves as research instruments *towards* groups of people that are in some way external/foreign.

Autobiography, as opposed to traditional ethnography, represents a turn *inward*. When writing an autobiography, an author retroactively and selectively writes about past experiences. Usually, the author does not live through these experiences solely to make them part of a published document; rather, these experiences are assembled using hindsight (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011). So, while an autobiography is when an individual writes retroactively, selecting past experiences, using hindsight, narrative inquiry is a form of research where the researchers seek the meaning, background, etc. of the narrative, which may be autobiographical. Narrative inquirers strive to attend to the ways in which a story is constructed, for whom and why, as well as the cultural discourses that it draws upon". Autobiographical material may be used as material for narrative inquiry.

Putting it all together, Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2011) provide a comprehensive description of autoethnography:

...an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze personal experience in order to understand cultural experience. This approach challenges canonical ways of doing research and representing others and treats research as a political, socially-just and socially-conscious act. A researcher uses tenets of autobiography and ethnography to do and write

autoethnography. Thus, as a method, autoethnography is both process and product. (p. 1)

As with any form of qualitative inquiry, the epistemological premise of autoethnography posits that reality and science are interpreted by human beings focused on explaining some phenomenon and its interactions aside from numbers and statistics. This emphasis on the quality - rather than the quantity - of data correlates well with the open-ended nature of the research questions that guide this self-study (Tilley-Lubbs, 2016).

As a methodology, autoethnography “acknowledges and accommodates subjectivity, emotionality, and the researcher’s influence on research, rather than hiding from these matters or assuming they don’t exist” (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011, p. 275). In direct contrast to the positivist edict of objective distance from the data, the method involves using the researcher’s own experience as data for theoretical analysis. As such, autoethnography has been defined as a postmodernist construct (Reed-Danahay, 1997). Wall (2006) notes that the essence of postmodernism is that “[...] many ways of knowing and inquiring are legitimate and that no one way should be privileged” (p. 2). Traditional scientific approaches require researchers to minimize their selves, viewing self as a “[...] contaminant and attempting to transcend and deny it” (Wall, 2006, p. 2).

The researcher’s role requires putting bias and subjectivity aside in the scientific research process by denying his or her identity. McCorkel and Meyers (2003) note that researchers have generally dealt with “identity politics” by either omitting considerations of identity from their discussions of study design and research methodology or by briefly acknowledging crude aspects of their identities (such as race, class, and gender) without explicating how their data, analyses, and conclusions were shaped by their positionality. Autoethnography rejects the deep-rooted

binary oppositions between “researcher and the researched, objectivity and subjectivity, process and product, self and others, art and science, and the person and the political” (Ellington & Ellis, 2008, pp. 450-459). Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2011) conceptualize autoethnography as an approach which represents both a *process* and a *product*.

Process

As a process, autoethnography represents a method of inquiry that falls under the genre of narrative inquiry. A key focus of the autoethnographer is on the engagement and craft of writing as a central process of discovery. In other words, autoethnography treats the writing process itself as a method of inquiry (Richardson, 2000). The process of autoethnography involves writing about, analyzing, and interpreting selected epiphanies that stem from interactions involving being part of a culture (Ellis et al., 2011). Narrative inquiry is a particularly appropriate approach to exploring identity formation, since personal narratives can be seen as a version of a person’s identity work (Taylor & Littleton, 2006). Narratives are continuously under construction, and reflective of the changing social contexts in which they are created. They are produced for particular and prevailing ideologies within the individual’s social environments (Taylor & Littleton, 2006, p. 23) and reflect the individual’s motivations (Baumeister & Newman, 1994). Individuals are actively engaged in this identity work as the language, meanings and identity positions of their society continue, are negotiated and change. Furthermore, as socially constructed meanings change, the identities of individuals are dynamic, responsive and negotiated (Taylor & Littleton, 2006).

For Denzin and Lincoln (2006), an autoethnographic approach entails “[...] engaging in ethnographical practice through personal, lived experience; writing the self into the ethnographic narrative” (p. 379). I use ethnographic methods such as observation, participation, and interviews

to collect data. Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2011) unpackage the concept further, describing autoethnography as “...an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (*graphy*) personal experiences (*auto*) in order to understand cultural experience (*ethno*)” (p. 273).

As noted above, autoethnography combines ethnography with autobiography, and entails “writing about the personal and its relationship to culture” (Ellis, 2004, p. 37). An autoethnographic research process is further characterized by reciprocity, reflexivity, dialogue, storytelling, and movement toward social action (Holman Jones, 2005). Within autoethnography, I include the data that emerge from my own reflexivity and introspection as a researcher. I can write this as a personal narrative, but by combining this personal story with the ethnography, I can examine the meaning I give to the phenomenon while at the same time trying to understand it from both the individual and the group perspectives. Autoethnographers argue that self-reflexive critique upon one’s positionality as researcher inspires readers to reflect critically upon their own life experience, their constructions of self, and their interactions with others within sociohistorical contexts (Ellis & Bochner, 1996; Goodall, 1998). Autoethnographers use reflexivity to trouble “the relationship between researchers’ ‘selves’ and ‘others’”; being reflexive means taking seriously the self’s location(s) in culture and scholarship.

Ellis and Bochner (2000) captured the essence of the autoethnographic process beautifully in their oft-cited passage:

Back and forth auto-ethnographers gaze, first through an ethnographic wide-angle lens, focusing outward on social and cultural aspects of the personal experience; then they look inward,

exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move
through, refract and resist cultural interpretations. (p. 739)

In sum, autoethnography as a process refers to a research form that presents critical self-study or an analysis of the experience of the self. It is a genre of first person narrative scholarship (Bochner, 2012) based on the premise that understanding the self is “a precondition and a concomitant condition to the understanding of others (Pinar, as cited in Casey, 1995, p. 217). Ellis (2004) conceptualizes autoethnographic research as “research, writing, story, and method that connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social, and political” showcasing “action, emotion, embodiment, self-consciousness, and introspection” (p. xix). According to Reed-Danahay (1997), autoethnography is “a form of self-narrative that places the self within a social context,” and also represents both “a method and a text” (p. 6). However, Spry’s (2001) description of the method as a “self-narrative that critiques the situatedness of self with others in social contexts” (p. 710) proves more accurate to my use of autoethnography. The author’s use of the terms “critiques” and “situatedness” imply the inherent focus and value I placed upon understanding my own positionality as a researcher.

Product

As a product, autoethnography displays the process of connecting the personal to the social and cultural world so that others can experience it as well. Autoethnographies, as products, have taken many forms, including “short stories, poetry, fiction, novels, photographic essays, scripts, personal essays, journals, fragmented and layered writing, and social science prose” (Ellis, 2004, p. 38) featuring “...concrete action, emotion, embodiment, self-consciousness, and introspection portrayed in dialogues, scenes, characterization, and plot” (p. xix). These continue to be generated in new mediums. The researcher’s goal should be to produce “[...] aesthetic and

evocative thick descriptions of personal and interpersonal experience” (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011, p 277). The researcher’s goal is to use life experience to generalize to a larger group (Ellis, 1999).

Approaches to Autoethnography: Methodological Orientations

Within the genre, diversities in perspective, context, and form exist. Where educational scholars seem to diverge from one another is in the amount of stress that they put on the different aspects of this scholarship. Ellis and Bochner (2000) note that there are numerous ways to compose an autoethnography and that the style chosen hinges on the writer's placement “... along the continuum of art and science” (p. 750). Ellis and Bochner offer an insightful triadic model to explain the complexity of autoethnographic variety. They observe that “autoethnographers vary in their emphasis on the research process (graphy), on culture (ethno), and on self (auto)” and that “different exemplars of autoethnography fall at different places along the continuum of each of these three axes” (p. 740). As such, two common forms of autoethnography are currently in publication: evocative autoethnography and analytic autoethnography. Analytic autoethnographers represent the minority position, focusing on developing theoretical explanations of broader social phenomena whereas evocative autoethnographers focus on narrative presentations that open up conversations and evoke emotional responses (Ellington & Ellis, 2013).

There are those who have tended to emphasize the importance of methodological rigor when it comes to the cultural relevance of a given study (Chang, 2008; Anderson, 2006; Wall, 2006), and others who have embraced and argued for the validity of a focus on personal experience (Ellis, 2002, 2004; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011; Jensen-Hart & Williams, 2010; Muncey, 2005; Spry, 2001).

Evocative Autoethnography

Traditional autoethnography, also known as evocative autoethnography (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, 2006) solely presents a series of self-narratives in a way that “the mode of story-telling is akin to the novel or biographies and thus fractures the boundaries that normally separate social science from literature” (p. 744). Evocative autoethnographers focus on narrative presentations that open up conversations and evoke emotional responses, whereas analytic autoethnographers represent the minority position, focusing on developing theoretical explanations of broader social phenomena (Ellis & Ellington, 2010). Evocative autoethnography has no universally accepted format or methodology. In evocative autoethnography “the mode of storytelling is akin to the novel or biography and thus fractures the boundaries that normally separate social science from literature . . . the narrative text refuses to abstract and explain” (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 744). Evocative autoethnography is social constructivist and literary in its orientation. Thus, through the evocative lens, issues of reliability and validity are of secondary importance. Denzin (2006) sums up the evocative position, putting forward that evocative autoethnographers “...want to change the world by writing from the heart” (p. 422).

Analytical Autoethnography

Analytical autoethnography is a response to the call for an incorporation of social realist scholarship within the realm of autoethnography. Duncan (2005) argues:

Although ethnographic and autoethnographic reports are presented in the form of personal narratives, this research tradition does more than just tell stories. It provides reports that are scholarly and justifiable interpretations based on multiple sources of evidence. This means autoethnographic

accounts do not consist solely of the researcher's opinions but are also supported by other data than can confirm on triangulate those opinions (p. 5).

The analytic approach tends toward objective writing and analysis over empathy and resonance with the reader. As such, analytical autoethnography is more compatible with traditional ethnographic practices and epistemological assumption. Anderson (2006), one of the realist researchers, does not fully agree with the scholarly goal of evocative autoethnography, arguing "Evocative autoethnographers have argued that narrative fidelity to and compelling description of subjective emotional experiences create an emotional resonance with the reader that is the key goal of their scholarship (p. 377). Instead, Anderson reifies the significance of improving theoretical understandings about broad social phenomena when conducting autoethnographic research. His proposal – analytic autoethnography – focuses on traditional research values such as gaining insight into broader social phenomena and drawing wider implications from personal experience. Anderson identifies five main features of analytical autoethnography: (1) complete member researcher status, (2) analytic reflexivity, (3) narrative visibility of the researcher's self, (4) dialogue with informants beyond the self, and (5) a commitment to theoretical analysis. Commenting further on the fifth key feature, Anderson writes "The definitive feature of analytic autoethnography is this value-added quality of not only truthfully rendering the social world under investigation but also transcending that world through broader generalization" (p. 388). He contrasts this approach with that of evocative autoethnographers who reject the possibility of trying to generalize from their experiences.

Hybrid Position

Elements of both the evocative and analytic traditions of autoethnography will be drawn upon within this investigation of my teacher identity formation. A brief description of each position will be provided to support the justification of this decision. The purpose of my inquiry is not to focus solely on my personal thoughts and emotions, but rather to find the mutual influences that my contexts and I have had upon one another. Although I have chosen to write from the first person's perspective, my goal is not to dwell on my own ideas or emotions but rather to explore the dialogical thoughts and perceptions that were exchanged between the observed and the observer. As an experimental methodology, different autoethnographic studies call for different approaches (Ellis, 2004).

Ellis (2004) sheds light upon the possibilities for hybrid positions, describing how the evocative emphasis on storytelling and analytical emphasis on data analysis can be successfully combined:

You may simply want to position yourself in your research by telling your story, then move to analyzing the stories of others, which you connect back to your story. Your focus would be on analysis of narrative. Alternatively, you might focus on telling your story, then frame it with an analysis of literature, and concentrate on raising questions about that literature or about accepted theoretical notions, or on generating new ideas. (p. 198)

This means that a researcher who seeks to preserve the evocative nature and emotion of their narrative may choose to keep the story and the analysis completely separate. In contrast,

another researcher might elect to integrate the story and the analysis because it better serves their subject matter, their target audience or their writing style (Pace, 2012).

Reflection upon the multi-faceted purposes of my study supported the decision to adopt a hybrid position. A central dimension of the critical-constructivist perspective involves gaining awareness of ourselves as social, cultural, and historical beings. People who gain such an awareness, Kincheloe (2005) asserts, understand “how and why their political opinions, religious beliefs, gender roles or racial perspectives have been shaped by dominant perspectives” (p. 81). I initially engaged with an autoethnographic methodology for sense-making purposes – to *reveal*. A desire to understand the relationship between lived experience and positionality demanded a critical lens for analysis. This lens also served the following purpose of honoring the emancipatory nature of the critical paradigm. Upon the culmination of the process that is autoethnographic inquiry and analysis, a new purpose emerges in the form of generating a product that renovates with others; a tool for transactive action of their own. As such, it was just as important that I “show” the reader how I engaged with praxis in the pursuit of critical consciousness.

Vryan (2006) has offered some suggestions for expanding Anderson’s definition of analytic autoethnography to make it less restricted, more flexible and more inclusive. Vryan problematizes the fourth of Anderson’s five key features - demanding data from people other than the researcher – instead suggesting that:

...including data from and about others is not a necessary requirement of all analytic autoethnography; the necessity, value, and feasibility of such data will vary according to the specifics of a given project and the goals of its creator(s). (p. 406).

As such, I developed a framework that honors both the raw, emotional nature of the evocative position as well as the commitment to theoretical analysis underpinning the analytical position. In addition, I also experiment with blended positions.

Writing Styles in Autoethnography

In addition to varied methodological orientations, published autoethnographies have paid different levels of attention to narration/description and analysis/interpretation. This has resulted in diversified “mix[es] of artistic representation, scientific inquiry, self-narration, and ethnography” (Ngunjiri, Hernandez & Chang, 2010; as cited in Chang & Boyed, 2011, p. 14). Chang (2008) describes four different styles of autoethnographic writing. These included “descriptive-realistic” writing, “confessional-emotive” writing, “analytic-interpretive” writing, and “imaginative-creative” (p. 148) writing.

Descriptive-realistic stories provide the opportunity to “depict people, places, experiences, and events as ‘accurately’ as possible with minimal character judgement and evaluation (Chang, 2008, p. 143). In confessional-emotive tales, the autoethnographer is “free to expose confusion, problems, and dilemmas in life. Personal agonies, usually hidden from public view, are often subjects” (p. 145). While this type of writing opens the door to readers’ participation, these same attributes may be perceived as “self-indulgent” (p. 145). Analytic-interpretive writing can be best understood by breaking the term into its separate parts. In analytical writing, “essential features transcending particular details are highlighted and relationships among data fragments are explained” (p. 146). The analytical discourse, grounded in specifics, shows the researcher’s ability to see interconnectedness within the case. In interpretive writing, “the researcher transcends factual data and cautious analysis and begins to probe into what is to be made of them” (p. 146). Taken together, these two constructs provide an

opportunity to look at the broader context to make sense of the relationship between the researcher's case and the context. Chang also notes that the researcher can also connect a specific case to broader societal issues (e.g. racism). Finally, imaginative-creative writing includes "poetry, drama, and fiction are used in creative ways to blur the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction in ways that connect data with a social context" (p. 147). Chang responds to critics who assert that this style of writing lacks significant cultural analysis and interpretation, arguing that the "very experimental style is limited only by one's own imaginative energy" (p. 147).

In sum, methodological variation, coupled with different writing styles, has produced a wide range of autoethnographies. The descriptive-realistic and analytical-interpretive categories of autoethnographic presentation lean toward a more "scientific" approach to autoethnography. On the other hand, the confessional-emotive and imaginative-creative categories lean more toward "artistic representation" (Chang & Boyd, 2016). In line with the sentiment put forth by Chang (2008), I argue that the analytical-interpretative orientation represents the core of autoethnography as a qualitative research process and products because it is at this location – cultural analysis - where autoethnographic writings differ from other forms of self-narrative writing. However, I also acknowledge the utility of the other three writing styles. Collectively, all four writing styles served to enhance both the process of conducting autoethnography and the construction of the autoethnographic product. As a result, I have chosen to incorporate all four writing styles into my autoethnographic product through the cultivation of a framework which honors the additional value of the analytical-interpretive category as it pertaining to my study while strategically utilizing the value embedded in the descriptive-realistic, confessional-emotive, and imaginative-creative writing styles. These writing styles are addressed in detail within the 'Structured Vignette Analysis Framework' located at the end of this chapter.

Critical Autoethnography

Writing style within the scope of autoethnography is highly varied and is dependent upon the extent to which researchers emphasize the personal and experiential, versus the cultural and social, in their texts. This has led to various forms and definitions of autoethnography. In line with the nature of the research questions which frame this study, the autoethnography conducted here takes the form of a ‘critical autoethnography’, which represents a merger of autoethnography with the philosophical position of critical theory for the purpose of situating lived experiences within larger systems of power. Critical theorists believe in a historical realism that both prompts and permeates their findings. For them, reality is shaped by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender values. As such, the historical situatedness of research is the appropriate criteria in that it takes account of these reality-shaping values (Lincoln & Guba, 1994). Critical theorists posit a negotiable reality that is mediated by power dynamics embedded in language, culture, and history. Much like Boylorn and Orbe (2011), I seek to harness “the productivity inherent within autoethnography as means to enhance existing understandings of lived experiences enacted within social locations situated within larger systems of power, oppression, and social privilege”(p. 19). The critical-constructivist positionality is open-ended and migratory. Such a conception of voice depicts it as not independent and pre-existent but forged out of the individual’s discursive and semiotic interplay with the power of patriarchy, racism, class-bias, and other social forces. Thus, the individual does not *discover* a voice that was there all the time but *fashions* one in negotiation with his or her environment. In the context of inquiry, critical constructivism intervenes in the fashioning process by pointing out the omnipresence of power (Finke, 1993). An informed voice is fashioned that is empowered to speak/write in the cause of social justice and egalitarian social change.

In this analysis, a critical lens will be adopted as a means to open up a space of resistance between the individual and the collective (Jones, 2005). In this space, the critical autoethnographer's goal is to not only focus on how their lived experiences are impacted by the dominant social order, but to defy and deconstruct this order. According to Boylorn and Orbe (2013), critical autoethnography is about connecting the interpersonal experiences of race, gender, sexuality, and ability to larger systems of power, social privileges, and oppression. Taylor, Taylor and Luitel, (2012) sum up the position nicely, asserting "In critical autoethnographic inquiry, the autobiographical 'self' is set in a dialectical tension against the ethnographic 'Other', the researcher investigating critically his or her own cultural situatedness from the standpoint of both a cultural insider and border crosser, excavating the way in which his or her professional identity has been shaped (distorted) historically by hegemonic cultural, social, political and economic imperatives [Taylor and Settelmaier 2003]" (p. 382).

Combining the methodology of autoethnography with the critical research paradigm permits me to 'swim against the tide' of the norms established by the dominant society, problematizing my own actions and practices from a sociocultural, critical, and ultimately a poststructural perspective. Since I conduct research with vulnerable and marginalized populations, it is important to incorporate a methodology that pushes me to examine my own cultural perspectives as a member of the dominant society. Critical autoethnography allows me to examine myself in a systematic and transparent way. To arrive at a state of critical consciousness regarding my own cultural perspectives, I need to examine how I position myself within socially constructed categories (Banks & Banks, 2012) that create or erase power and privilege: race, ethnicity, religion, class, gender, sexual preference, language, etc. I can recognize myself as a member of the dominant and powerful culture only first analyzing how social norms

position power and privilege, and then by understanding my own cultural heritage within the dominant culture.

Tilley-Lubbs' (2016) justification for adopting a critical autoethnographic approach resonates best with my use of the genre. She explains:

Through critical autoethnography, I can position myself in the research [Behar, 1996] to critically examine my own practices as a researcher, navigating the vulnerable spaces that require me to examine my own words and actions with the same care that guides me as I examine those of the other participants in the study. My vulnerability also causes me to be more conscious of other people, which many times guides my selection of the data I want to include in the narrative. (p. 6)

Conducting research and writing within the theoretical framework of this methodology has caused me to become aware that conscientization is not a product; it is not something static and/or tangible that is ultimately achieved. At the same time that I arrive at a state of conscientization in one aspect of my work, my perspectives based on my heritage in the dominant culture surge forth in another situation, and once again I act from that ingrained perspective (Tilley-Lubbs, 2016). Critical autoethnographers are invested in the "politics of positionality" (Madison, 2012) that require researchers to acknowledge the inevitable privileges we experience alongside marginalization and to take responsibility for our subjective lenses through reflexivity. We write as an 'Other', and for the 'Other'.

Tilley-Lubbs (2016) sums up my purpose to adopting this position best:

While I interpret my own work, I visualize conscientization as a process that occurs repeatedly insofar as we remain open to being vulnerable through introspection and to admitting our roles as oppressors. With these illustrations, I show the potential of critical autoethnography for helping us as researchers to distance ourselves from the perspectives of the dominant culture that shaped our beliefs and practices as oppressors. This perspective leads the way for listening and hearing words and their diverse meanings that are based on the cultural context from which I come and against which I push (p. 7)

Summary

I struggled with being heard and was conflicted about utilizing any portion of autoethnography because I did not want to come across as self-indulgent, narcissistic, egotistical, or any of those slurs hurled at autoethnographers (Sparkes, 2002). After reading, researching, and searching, I came to terms with the method and its useful madness. I began to understand that “the emotional does not wipe out the *public*, *theoretical*, and *rational*” (Sparkes, 2002, p. 216; emphasis in the original). This study is emotional; however, that does not negate its scholarship.

As is evident, there are numerous approaches to autoethnography, and a variety of tools one can employ to help such a project progress. I have selected to adopt a critical autoethnographic position as it best serves my dual purpose of excavating and exploring the culturally embedded identities that constitute my teaching ‘self’ while generating critical reflexivity with which to deconstruct the hegemonic grip of my own cultural history with the aim

of reshaping my identities, beliefs, and values. As a methodology, critical autoethnography has provided me a key to open the closed doors of my classroom and my soul to observe in retrospection my professional experience along with personal human development. I will investigate how the process of my personal transformation affects my professional growth as a teacher. Both sets of experiences are dissected into smaller, but nonetheless, important components. A thorough self-examination permits me to follow my human and professional journey through states, cultures, and different political and academic systems. This method let me foreshadow my memories, actions, thoughts, and feelings. The fieldwork of this study is my life and teaching experiences within the sociological and academic setting of various cultures. Chang (2008) claims that auto-ethnography promotes a better understanding of ourselves within our multicultural world, and measures teaching practice in the context of teachers' personal and professional experience. Autoethnography sets the stage to reveal my assumptions as an individual and as a teacher.

Research Design

Description of Participants

In this study, the researcher and subject are the same. As both researcher and subject, I have the opportunity to speak as a participant in the research. Studying my experiences within various cultures is "precisely what is needed to move inquiry and knowledge further along" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994, p. 3). The purpose of placing my voice, thoughts, and reflections into the text of this study through the utilization of critical autoethnographic methods provides a way to avoid "...a mere summary and interpretation of the works of others, with nothing new added" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994, p. 3). Doing so is critical to understand and recognize that

as I relate experiences, evaluate situations, and make inferences throughout this study, my situation in life, my beliefs, and my experiences all influence the reality I see.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data Collection Methods: Overview

The data collection strategies for this autoethnographic inquiry are rooted in the need to address the research goals on one hand and from the specifics of autoethnographic design on the other. In line with ethnographers, I considered my autobiographical data with “critical, analytical, and interpretative eyes to detect cultural undertones of what is recalled, observed, and told” (Chang, 2008, p. 209). As autoethnography concentrates predominantly on the researcher’s self and understanding that self within a certain culture, it is the researcher’s personal memory that serves as the primary source of data. I utilized personal narrative through storytelling as the chief method of data collection for this study.

However, personal-memory data is not without controversy. Dillard (1987) argued that our memory of the past is illusive, selective, and distortive. Critics highlight the subjective nature of human memory in efforts to demonstrate how the act of conjuring up personal memories is an imperfect process. Chang, Ngunjiri and Hernandez (2012) present a counter narrative, urging researchers to embrace and take full advantage of the subjective nature of memory work in their autoethnographic work. Admittedly a representative of the evocative position within the genre of autoethnography, Ellis (2009) argues that it is the *process* of storying ourselves that is essential rather than the validity of actual memory. She explains:

To story ourselves does not mean to describe the way that it
‘really’ happened... it means to ‘see and rediscover the past, not as
a succession of events but as a series of scenes, invention,

emotions, images, and stories' rewritten by the author within the conditions set by the author. In turn, as the story is being produced, it affects the author's re-experience of what happened [Denzin, 2008, p. 118; see also Ulmer, 1989]. The story of and the 'I' in the story come into being in the telling (Jackson & Mazzei, in press).
(p. 16)

To reiterate, Ellis suggests that the primary purpose of memory work is not about collecting perfectly accurate details about the past. Rather, personal memory data allows the researcher to recollect his/her past as he/she remembers it. Through this process, the researcher relearns, reinterprets, and brings to light how the past continues to inform the future.

Clearly, data collection methods vary depending where one's autoethnographic work is positioned on the evocative/analytical spectrum. While I intend to honor the autoethnographic tradition of telling vivid stories aimed to evoke an emotional response from the reader and which invite the reader into my lived experience (Ellis & Bochner, 2000), the principles behind the critical intentions that drive my inquiry demand additional measures. Memory alone cannot be a single sufficient tool for collecting data as researchers' objectivity can be challenged (Holt, 2003). Chang, Ngunjiri and Hernandez (2012) suggest collecting data from multiple sources for the purpose of cultivating a "thick description" (p. 74) of the researcher's life and sociocultural context. The authors' assert that the use of multiple data sources serves to enhance the credibility of the researcher's stories and interpretation through the triangulation of data sources. In accordance with the methodological guidelines for autoethnography provided by Chang (2008), I utilized a combination of personal memory data, self-observational data, self-reflective data, and

external data to inform my search of self, which Chang argues is necessary “to confirm, complement, or dispute internal data generated from recollection and reflection” (p. 8).

Personal memory data

“Personal memory is a building block of autoethnography because the past gives a context to the present self and memory opens a door to the richness of the past” (Chang, 2008, p. 71). As autoethnography concentrates predominantly on the researcher’s self and understanding that self within a certain culture, it is the researcher’s personal memory that serves as the primary source of data. Ellis (1999) identifies the narratives that collectively represent the ‘heart’ of an autoethnography as “critical incidents”. Tripp (1993) indicates that incidents in practice become significant when they strikingly appear as an example of a wider social category or dramatically contrast with previous experience. Tripp puts forward, “The moment of surprise, awareness or noting the distinctive character of such events is a first step, but for an episode to become critical it has to be interpreted and interrogated” (p. 25). An incident becomes ‘critical’ in nature when it leads to increased sensitivity to ones values and to re-examination of implicit beliefs and theories. Tripp (1993) explains:

...critical incidents are not ‘things’ which exist
independently of an observer and are awaiting discovery
like gold nuggets or desert islands, but like all data, critical
incidents are created. Incidents happen, but critical
incidents are produced by the way we look at a situation: a
critical incident is an interpretation of the significance of an
event. (p. 8)

In other words, events/episodes attain “criticality” via the justification, the significance, and the meaning given to them by participants (Roach & Kratochwill, 2004). Tripp points out that certain kinds of critical incidents are more strongly directed towards biographical or to political understanding. These are often emotionally charged and lead to searches into the origins of the values expressed in a particular response to a situation. Thus, when a critical incident occurs, it interrupts (or highlights) the taken for granted ways of thinking about teaching. Haynes and Murriss (2012) explain that such critical episodes “help to describe the relationship between practitioners, students and their socio-political contexts and epistemological frameworks” (p. 131). A series of critical incidents, taken together, can constitute an autoethnography.

Chang’s (2008) systematic, stepwise approach to recalling personal data takes the form of three writing exercises: chronicling, inventorying, and visualizing self. Chronicling self serves as a tool for collecting personal memory data extending over several years – otherwise known as longitudinal data. The exercise will begin with the production of a chronological autobiographical timeline in which I will write down events, happenings, and incidents about my life that are related to my teacher identity. Inventorying the self begins with the selection of events, happenings, and incidents that have led to cultural self-discoveries (Chang, 2008, pp. 72-74, 157) in my life. Significant events from the timeline will be expanded upon in order to connect the experience to the larger cultural and social systems.

Inventorying self involves “...not only collecting data but also evaluating and organizing data” (Chang, 2008, p. 76). Thus, I will evaluate each memory bite and subsequently will organize them according to rank from the most important to the least important. The level of importance will be contingent upon the focus of the research project. Preliminary analysis and interpretation also takes place at this stage. The visualization strategy utilized for this project

involves free drawing, a culture gram, and word-webs. Chang summarizes, “Through writing exercises of chronicling, inventorying, and visualizing self, you are encouraged to unravel your memory, write down fragments of your past, and build a database for your cultural analysis and interpretation” (p. 72).

Self-observational/self-reflective data

While personal memory data opened a door to the richness of the past, self-observational data was utilized to capture my actions, thoughts, and emotions as they occurred in their natural contexts in the present. One way of learning about yourself, according to Chang (2008), is by observing your own daily or weekly routines for a designated period of time: for example, what you do in solitude or in the company of others, what you say, what you feel, what you think, whom you include and exclude in your interactions, where you frequent, and which material objects are necessary in your present life. Self-reflective data results from “introspection, self-analysis, and self-evaluation of who you are and what you are” (Chang, 2008, p. 95). Acts of critical reflection involve applying meaning to and assessing the value of the phenomena under study – the event, person, and location. Self-observation and self-reflection can be distinguished in terms of whether it observes the external or internal reality of the researcher respectively (Chang, 2008).

I kept a field journal, in the form of a legal pad, next to my computer as I generated each of the initial self-narratives. To inform the reader that I utilized my field journal to capture observations and reflections is to understate how significant this additional layer of data capture proved to be. The field journal represented a location where I recorded my honest feelings, emotions, and sentiment pertaining to various characters and contexts within the critical

incidents in the process of being storied. Ultimately, recording this ‘raw’ and ‘unfiltered’ sentiment proved invaluable to the ongoing process of writing, analysis, and interpretation.

External data

Chang (2008) explains that “data from external sources – others, visual artifacts, documents, and literature – provide additional perspectives and contextualizes information to help you investigate and examine your subjectivity” (p. 103). I utilized external data sources to confirm, compliment, or dispute the internal data generated from recollection and reflection. Artifacts, argues Chang (2008), “are the material manifestations of culture that illuminate their historical contexts” (p. 107). Artifacts informing this study included documents, photographs, student commentary, awards, and email correspondence.

Data Analysis

Step 1: Constructing the Personal Narrative

Autoethnography uses personal experience as primary data with the researcher as the primary data source. Albeit a process and a product, autoethnography leaves data collection methods open to interpretation. I began the process by constructing of a personal narrative that was derived from the data excavated using Chang’s (2008) suggested methods for data collection, which I will describe in further detail below. Within this self-study, storytelling serves as the chief method of data collection. Connelly and Clandinin (2006) provide a definition of narrative inquiry - the central tenant of data collection within the methodology of autoethnography:

People shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are and as they interpret their past in terms of these stories. Story, in the current idiom, is a portal through which a person enters the

world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful. Narrative inquiry, the study of experience as story, then, is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience. Narrative inquiry as a methodology entails a view of the phenomenon. To use narrative inquiry methodology is to adopt a particular view of experience as phenomenon under study. (p. 375)

First, I constructed written personal narratives of specific critical incidents based solely upon my own personal memory data. Interestingly, the generation, analysis and interpretation of data occurred simultaneously in this project. Ellis (2004) supports this notion, explaining that autoethnographic researchers continually move back and forth between collecting and analyzing data, as well as interpreting results. Chang (2008) describes self-reflective data as “introspection, self-analysis, and self-evaluation of who you are and what you are” (p. 95). In other words, the self-reflection work that I conducted entailed applying meaning to and assessing the value of the phenomena under study. After the initial written narrative was completed, I then utilized external data sources such as the literature review, emails, documents, and other “artifacts” to inform my search for self. Chang notes that such artifacts are necessary to “confirm, compliment, or dispute internal data generated from recollection and reflection” (p. 8), further adding that artifacts are “are the material manifestations of culture that illuminate their historical contexts” (p. 107). The external artifacts utilized to compliment my data included an email from the day of the incident, requested by my school principal, within which I described the actions of each of the students involved as well as a personal message written by a student the evening of the conflict.

Collectively, these elements serve to cultivate a “thick description” (Geertz, 1973) of the critical incident at hand.

Step 2: Data Analysis

Autoethnographers who adopt an analytic approach to their work stand to benefit from examining the analytic strategies that are used in the grounded theory research method.

Originally developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967), grounded theory represents an investigative process for developing/building theory by systematically gathering and analyzing data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Creswell, 2009). The aim of this primarily inductive research method is to generate (build) theory rather than test it (Creswell, 2013). The grounded theory researcher does not commence a study with a preconceived theory that needs to be proven, as is common in deductive research methods as used in objectivist paradigms. Instead, the researcher begins with a general field of study and allows the theory to emerge from the data (Pace, 2012).

Ellis and Bochner (2000) warn that incorporating grounded theory analysis into an autoethnographic study may require the researcher to “write in an authoritative voice” (p. 758) about the patterns discovered, which could detract from the stories being presented. However, Charmaz (2000) contends that by adopting a constructivist approach to grounded theory, researchers can avoid the possible authoritative objectivist trappings of the method. I adopted a constructivist approach to grounded theory, which is based on the assumption that people construct subjective realities through social interactions in which they use symbols such as words and gestures to communicate meaning. Similar to an autoethnographic methodology, grounded theory seeks to explore how people create meaning and discover how they define their realities within a particular social context (Fassinger, 2005). In addition, the constructivist approach to grounded theory serves my blended autoethnographic position. According to this approach, one

does not seek a single, universal and lasting truth (evocative), but remains realist because it addresses human realities and assumes the existence of real worlds (analytical).

Similar to that of autoethnography, theory is generated through a process of constant comparative analysis, in which data is collected and analyzed simultaneously - data, analysis and theory are constantly interacting (e.g. having a “dialogue” with each other). Through an ongoing process of collecting, coding, conceptualizing and theorizing, new data is compared to emerging conceptual themes or categories until no new themes are discovered. Charmaz (2014) sums it up, explaining, “Grounded theory begins with inductive data, invokes iterative strategies of going back and forth between data and analysis, uses comparative methods, and keeps you interacting and involved with your data and emerging analysis” (p. 1).

According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), analysis in grounded theory is comprised of three levels of coding: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. The authors define open coding as “the analytical process through which concepts are identified and their properties and dimensions discovered in the data” (p. 101). This initial level of coding entails the initial classification and naming, labeling, and categorizing of concepts. When analyzing my personal narratives, open codes/categories were initially identified and written directly onto the transcript itself in order to relate codes to the text. Afterwards, these were listed on notecards denoted by different colored adhesive tabs, which were displayed on a large wall in my bedroom. In order to prevent a loss of perspective on the extent of data and emerging categories, a separate working document was created to link ideas, actual quotes, and category headings. For example, in Axial coding, the next step in grounded theory coding procedures, involves a process of systematically relating categories to other subcategories. Strauss and Corbin (1998) note that this level is termed ‘axial’ because coding occurs around the axis of a category with a focus on

linking categories at a level of linking properties and dimensions. During this level of coding, I reanalyzed the results of the open coding process; an action aimed at organizing the initial codes, linking them together, and identifying key analytic categories. The aim of axial coding is to look for answers to questions such as why, when, how, and with what results (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). It is in answering these questions that the researcher is able to contextualize a phenomenon. Numerous categories emerged through this process, including race, rapport with students, views of teaching role, respect from teachers/administration, ethnicity, demands on teachers, demands of self, school hierarchy, agency, educational policy, professionalism, knowledge and skills, project-based learning, student engagement, student-centered learning, work-based mentoring, and higher education.

Selective coding builds on the results of open coding and axial coding. In this final level, major categories are integrated to form larger theoretical schemes and begin to take on the form of theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Put another way, selective coding focuses on the selection of a central or core category. In sum, six categories emerged.

“Validity”

According to Merriam (2009), “as in any research, validity, reliability, and ethics are major concerns” (p. 234). For some researchers, terms like believability, trustworthiness, and transferability are the indicators for assessing quality (Creswell, 1998; Lincoln and Guba, 1985). However, my struggles with the criteria to evaluate autoethnographic research resonate with Corbin (2002) when he argues that, “everyone agrees evaluation is necessary but there is little consensus about what the evaluation should consist of” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 297). Therefore, the common measures of evaluation used by qualitative researchers, which include

validity, reliability, and generalizability, are problematic for autoethnographers (Starr, 2010). This is also why the title “Validity” is bounded by quotations.

Researchers who do autoethnography are not concerned with finding truths, but only providing coherent and consistent accounts of the experiences encountered, which Koch (1998) calls narrative fidelity (p. 164-165). So, what can we learn from one person’s account? Why does it matter, then, and what is the aim for telling these stories? To answer these questions, I again look to Koch (1998) who most eloquently explains:

Stories can show where we as [educators] have gone wrong.
Listening to the voices of the [teacher/researchers] may show us
what to do to improve practice. Stories can be used in evaluating
[education] development. Story telling can be therapeutic. Stories
can inform social policy. Stories can facilitate change in
organizations. Stories can allow marginalized groups to have a
voice. Stories can address diversity through understanding. (pg.
1183)

In general, autoethnographers share a common set of priorities, concerns, and ways of doing research. Adams, Jones, and Ellis (2015) put forward that all autoethnographers (1) foreground personal experience in research and writing, (2) illustrate sense-making processes, (3) use and show reflexivity, (4) illustrate insider knowledge of a cultural phenomenon/ experience, (5) describe and critique cultural norms, experiences, and practices, and (6) seek responses from audiences.

Ethical Considerations

The ethics involved in autoethnographic research are such that the researcher, who is also the subject, must consider those affected by, and who participates in, the experiences that are being told. Sometimes, this aspect of the research is difficult to contain because “even when you are the primary source of data, your story often includes others” (Chang, 2008, p. 68). Chang goes on to argue, with the help of Clandinin and Connelly (2000), with the question: “Do [you] own a story because [you] tell it” (p. 69)? To recognize that others are always implicated when you (re)tell stories entails extensive ethical obligations. This means the act of narrative and storytelling has the potential to put others on display even when the intent is to illuminate the self. Because of this, when I engaged in personal narrative and storytelling, I used pseudonyms for persons and contexts I interact with to relay the experiences I encounter from my own personal perspective. I also completed the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa IRB application for Human Research and was granted approval.

Presentation of Data

Autoethnography is both a process and a product. Another way in which writing differs for autoethnographers and ethnographers is the relative freedom that autoethnographers have to choose from a variety of styles, or to bring different styles together to represent the complex and multilayered experiences of the researcher. A great deal of emphasis is placed on experimenting with a variety of writing strategies, structures and styles. As mentioned earlier, writing is a method of inquiry in all types of qualitative study, but writing is acknowledged differently, more prominently, in autoethnographic studies

Ellis, Adams and Bochner (2011) clarify the notion of autoethnography as a product, explaining

...the autoethnographer not only tries to make personal experience meaningful and cultural experience engaging, but also, by producing accessible texts, she or he may be able to reach wider and more diverse mass audiences that traditional research usually disregards, a move that can make personal and social change possible for more people [Bochner, 1997; Ellis, 1995; Goodall, 2006; Hooks, 1994]. (p. 14).

The notion of producing “accessible texts” honors the autoethnographic tradition of showing “how” as opposed to “why”. Poulos (2013) explains,

The mantra of autoethnographers is simple [though not necessarily *easy*]: “*Show*, don’t tell!” Autoethnographers work to reveal and to demonstrate, to evoke and to show, how their experience unfolds in this complex human lifeworld we inhabit. (p. 45)

Vignettes

The findings from this study will be presented in the form a reflexive first-person narrative with embedded present-tense autoethnographic vignettes. Vignettes are used in ethnographic research to provide snapshots of a specific culture (Eriksson, 2013). The theory of autoethnographic vignettes was developed by Humphreys (2005) to increase his own self-reflexivity as an ethnographer. Each vignette embedded within my study offers for observation a particular event from my professional or personal life. It is hard to separate both as their roots and branches have intertwined into one substance. Although the vignettes that I write will provide some cultural self-understanding concerning my evolution as a critically conscious

teacher, each will be accompanied with analytic reflection, interpretation, and discussion of the events with the larger constructs of comments from other scholars.

A first-person tense is used so that readers can learn vicariously through my experience and try to imagine themselves in the encounter. The use of autoethnographic fragments enforces the idea of autoethnography as an open-ended sketch about past events and experiences. Ellis, Adams and Bochner (2011) assert that the understanding gained through the process of conducting autoethnography can be expressed through descriptions of epiphanies, defined as incidents of insight or revelation that changed the way the researcher viewed himself or his culture. Cole and Knowles note that thematic interpretations are finally represented “in the form of detailed and rich life history accounts” (2001, p. 13) told through stories and vignettes. This approach is in line with Rambo’s (2007) claim that through the techniques of autoethnographic vignettes researchers can share their emotions and personal information with readers, who get a chance to construct the meaning of what was not said by a researcher, but only implied. This study presents vignettes separated in place and time.

Structured Vignette Analysis

To assist my analyses I developed a structured method for analyzing each vignette to reveal layers of awareness. Each vignette is examined alone as a text yet follows a pattern where all of them come together into a cohesive story. The structure promotes a collaborative journey between the author and the reader; a means of honoring the autoethnographic tradition of showing ‘how’.

The use of a structured vignette analysis has the advantage of revealing several layers of awareness in my writing, described by Ronai (1995) as the “layered account”. This reflects the multi-paradigmatic approach which frames my study: from “understanding” to “emancipation”

and “deconstruction”. The different “voices” of the researcher add to the richness of the analysis as the personal leads into the academic reflexive voice (Pitard, 2015). The layered structure also serves a means of avoiding self-indulgent introspection after the beginning vignette/initial analysis stages. I achieved this through the development of a seven-step framework that will be applied to each vignette (Figure 1). Each of these layers offers up a different perspective to my vignettes.

Vignette and Analysis: Framework

Order	Section Title	Explanation/Purpose	Writing Style
1	Vignette	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “Transport myself back to the pre-reflective moment” ▪ Evocative, first-hand account ▪ “Snapshot” of the critical incident (narrative anecdotes); not general descriptions ▪ Liberty taken to produce an engaging narrative that best captures the emotionality of the experience for reader 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Imaginative-creative
2	Initial Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reflection-on-action (Schön, 1986) ▪ Examine experience from a personal perspective (at the time of the critical incident) ▪ To a large extent non-reflexive and lacking criticality; guided more so by emotion ▪ Baseline to later expose bias, assumptions, and perspectives ▪ Connections to relevant literature and theory established, but are generally limited. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Descriptive-realistic/confessional-emotive
3	Critical Catalyst	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “Historical Present” = Narrative style <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Reference point = in the past ○ Used to create an effect of immediacy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Confessional-emotive

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Tries to parachute the reader into the midst of an unfolding story, blur line between narration and actuality ○ Different from vignette in its focus on analysis as well <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Engaging means of storying the “discovery” ▪ Description (historical) and analysis (present) of specific experience from which a critical perspective was attained; ▪ Establishes pathway to “conscientization” ▪ Links initial analysis to critical analysis ▪ <i>Ex: Motivations, reinforce/challenge to held assumption, privilege/oppression, critical elements</i> <p>Various topics (personal and professional) addressed; spanning a life (from my stuttering ‘problem’ in elementary school to the narration of an additional dialogue I had with an actor one month prior to a critical incident he was involved in)</p>	
4	Critical Analysis: Layer 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Sense-Making: academic writing infused with a narrative elements ▪ Shifting lens “back and forth” e.g. Past/present, personal/professional/situational, self/other, local/national, etc. ▪ Theory and relevant literature embedded within narrative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Analytic-interpretive ▪ Confessional-emotive
5	<p>Creative Writing Measure</p> <p><i>“The point about creative writing is that it is impelled</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Brief section of framework ▪ Completed with <u>intentionality</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ AE: “vulnerable writing that calls attention to subjectivity, emotionality, and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Imaginative-creative

	<p><i>by a state of un-knowing. It is the anxiety of 'not understanding' that drives creativity – a state of conflict generated by the un-known promotes creative thought” (Freiman, 2007, p. 10).</i></p>	<p>contingency and brings readers into “feeling” contact with the suffering of others”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Purpose of creative writing measures: Humanize experience; give breath to the academic perspective in preceding section <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Primarily “creative non-fiction” in orientation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ A discourse grounded in fact but artful in execution ▪ Playful engagement with the materiality of language ▪ Critically examining identity “from all perspectives” – not limited to theory ▪ Potential to “liberate creativity and present a powerful stimulus for self-expression” <p><i>Examples:</i></p> <p><i>1. Third party interview: An interview - conducted by a third-party (neutral or non-neutral) - of actor(s) and myself (perspective-taking, reflexivity)</i></p> <p><i>2. Poetry, Short Stories Reflections: Embedded with or based-upon simile, metaphor, alliteration, and image/symbolism – e.g. taking an administrator’s labeling of me as a “maverick” literally (away from the herd, not branded, confusion about ownership) and figuratively...</i></p>	
6	Critical Analysis: Layer 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Build upon critical consciousness attained from findings of Layer 1 ▪ Fill in gaps/blank spots on the ‘canvas’. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Analytic-interpretive ▪ Confessional-emotive

CHAPTER 4

VIGNETTES AND ANALYSES

All references to students, teachers, schools, and others within the following four vignettes and their accompanying analyses are pseudonyms in order to protect and honor the privacy and identity of all involved. Below, I provide a timeline of my teaching career in order to provide the reader with context regarding the content of each vignette. As the critical praxis in autoethnographic is an inherently ‘messy’ process, my reflections and analyses do not follow a linear fashion despite the fact that the critical incidents storied in each of the four vignettes were designed to flow in reverse chronological order, beginning with the most recent. The pseudonyms given to each school reflect aspects of the activity/lifestyle which brought me to Hawai‘i in the first place: surfing. These are in no way intended to reflect the quality of each school, but instead represent my metaphorical journey into the ‘line up’ of teaching and education.

Order (career)	School Name	Location
1	Beginner Public High School	New Jersey
2	Lineup Charter School	Hawai‘i
3	Onshore Public High School	Hawai‘i
4	Offshore Academy (Private)	Hawai‘i
5	Barrel School (Private)	Hawai‘i

Vignette #1: “The Technical Teacher”

“Is anyone in this room of Native-Hawai‘i an descent?”, I enthusiastically ask my Modern Hawaiian History class, desperately attempting to simultaneously breathe life into a numb/cold classroom environment while cautiously navigating the growing sense of tension that I have become acutely aware of on this humid, Friday morning in late-April.

Trying to maintain positive energy – or at least present a façade of this - I lower my voice, smile, and widen my eyes “Nobody?”

I already know the answer to this question. There are quite a few Native-Hawaiian students in this class. Yet no one responds. The silence is absolutely deafening – it feels like a form of resistance. *Is that why I am feeling so defensive right now?*

I scan the classroom, searching for students of Native-Hawaiian ancestry in the hopes that mutual eye contact will spur one to respond to my initial query.

Nalu’s head is pressed firmly down upon on his desk, his folded arms acting as a pillow of sorts. A tight grasp on the cellphone in his left hand cues within me an awareness that he is not actually asleep. Most days, I attempt to get Nalu involved both early and often less risk him falling into the behaviors and habits that tend to distract other students in the class. By “habits”, I refer to Nalu’s superior interpersonal skill-skit – this kid can hold an audience! As much as I admire these abilities, experience has demonstrated time and time again that Nalu struggles to re-focus after off-task behaviors. Or maybe he could just care less about *my* class. *I wonder if he has made any headway on all of those missing assignments.*

Ann Marie’s stern glare brings me back to the present.

All the way from the back of our vacuous classroom, she and her two friends are at least ten feet away from the other students in class. In turn, this makes me consciously aware that these students have once again completely disregarded the circle that I had formed with their desks before school began today. *Is that an earbud I see?* Of course it is. Ann Marie makes her own rules these days.

I have should have spent more time ‘norming’ this class when I took over three months ago. My perception of the value inherent within a student-centered pedagogy has slowly eroded with each passing day. *Why did I invest so much energy into redesigning this course?* Nobody – and I mean nobody – who ‘matters’ has noticed. The principal has made it very clear to me that what ‘matters’ here can be demonstrated with a piece of notebook paper and a document-based question packet.

I recall her exact words. “Don’t be a maverick, Nick”. Just like that, she had dismissed my plan to incorporate 21st century skills into the classroom. I realize now that I could have justifiably chosen to be offended, depressed, or even frustrated. But I embraced none of these because I was aware that she was actually taking measures to ensure that I focused on teaching students the specific processes and skills that will be measured and ultimately tied to my

performance evaluation. This is exactly what matters here. Data matters. Competencies matter. Targets matter. Meeting minutes matter.

Maverick... This title resonates with me. I occupy a similar positionality as the original owner of this label. Much like the unbranded cattle that strayed from the herd, my ownership is also in doubt. I don't seem to belong to anyone or anywhere. I work for the public school system, but I am not *of* this place.

I am not *of* checklists of competencies; not *of* predicting writing outcomes of teenagers I barely know; not *of* explosive outbursts and habitual withdrawal.

Perspective is the difference between being *liberated* or *abandoned*. I am losing my grip on the few remaining threads that once were the fabric of a private school identity. I held them too tightly all along; they wore down quickly. I wore down too quickly. Burnt out; replaceable. Just another example of natural selection. Inevitable. But man... it was *good* while it lasted. That identity is a foreign language here. For the first time that I can remember in my career, I do not want to be here. Rejection. Judgement. And it's reciprocal.

Perhaps 'mercenary' is a more fitting title. I am fighting battles that are not my own; I am not of this place. I am foreign.

Blinking my dry eyes brings me back in the present. I feel my jaw clenching, an involuntary physical response to an ominous situation. I am angry that I do not have control. A flash of heat runs up my cheekbones, radiating from my forehead. I think to myself, '*Why am I so frustrated?*' the response is almost immediate. '*They don't like you and they don't respect you. They think that they are smarter than you*'. I already know where this train of thought will lead me and decide that I will attempt to remain present – a quality that I have learned from my yoga practice. Rubbing my dry eyes, I sit down at a desk close to where I am standing in the center of the classroom and take inventory of my feelings.

I am bleary, fatigued, and rundown. I have been this way for the larger part of the entire semester. Ultimately, I must head home from school each day and begin a new workday all over again; a daily ritual of conducting research and writing deep into the night. With each hour that passes, nerves and burdens increasingly emerge. Nerves are generally associated with the extent of one's agitation or worries; in my case, they represent deeply-held insecurities about my future. I am uncertain if I possess the abilities to actually earn a PhD, and further, am irresolute in my desire to even continue teaching. The degree represents desperately needed movement in a forward direction; positive momentum that I hope will remedy the lingering negative self-perceptions associated with the teacher burnout that grinded my life to halt only months ago. It brought me down to my knees and I have yet to truly stand again as I did before.

I exist in the purgatory of indecision and indifference, situated uncomfortably between contrasting perceptions of success. Presently, I am unable to perceive success as I once did – as a series of positive gains, triumphs, victories... It is interesting how we never formally defined the term as noun, adjective, or verb while growing up. *Is success a process? An achievement? A certain set of mastered competencies? Can someone who achieves success become a failure*

later? Instead, our understanding success was conflated with our understanding of ‘winning’. For the first time in my career, I do not feel as if I am winning anymore. My reality, as I perceive it, has been characterized by an ongoing cycle of loss, rejection, and failure. The facade of shine that I had cultivated as the ‘golden boy’ in a number of environments has exposed itself as a thin veneer. Compounding these feelings is the sheer contrast of my new environment to that of my former one; this truly does feel like a fall from grace, moving to a prison from a country club.

Yet here I am, still kicking months later, refusing to stay down for the count despite a complete loss of direction and purpose. At the moment, I do not see a clear path leading to future success, nor does completing this degree provide the guarantee of finding one. Instead, I obey a similar sentiment to that of Winston Churchill, who famously inspired the war-weary, all-but-defeated citizens of Great Britain to preserve once again. He argued, “If you’re going through hell, keep going”. So I continue to grind it out each evening, and often well into the early morning hours, because this work is movement, and movement represents hope. Gradually, my perception of success has evolved to an awareness that it is subjective; a perspective at the most. I am empowered to architect an understanding of success as I see fit. In this period of my life, success is those characteristics inherent to the act of picking oneself off of the ground time and time again despite getting knocked down. Success is courage, resilience, and grit. It is also self-forgiveness, self-care, and self-advocacy.

Although I want to believe fully in this new conceptualization of success, the daily realities of working within this specific context burden me. An ethic of care represents the metaphorical straps keeping me firmly secured in-between my past and my future. An awareness of the system I find myself within as broken should have freed me from its grasp. Instead, I have convinced myself on multiple occasions that I would only deal with issues that were in my control, I would not ‘care’ as much as I have in the past.

Holding me in place, these burdens raise their eyes to meet the fear in mine. They speak to the toxic sense of guilt and shame that I feel. *This is punishment. You would not be here if you were a better, more capable person. May these experiences remind you of your own inadequacies.*

The complete lack of administrative support at this school is remarkable – this was not the school I left two years ago. Shortly after the semester began, school-wide expectations of student conduct were reestablished. Teachers were subtly threatened into enforcing them all at a faculty-meeting that the administration titled “Take Back our School”. But one of our administrators had quit shortly after this decree, and now students are often sent back to class without consequence. Traumatizing and utterly demeaning classroom experiences tend to follow.

I usually switch gears at around 11 PM each night, when most people are going to bed, and create lessons and project-based learning activities for my current students. This takes so much time – literally hours each night - due to the sheer lack of educational resources available in this content area. These days, I equate bedtime to 1:00 AM, if not later. In my heart, I believe that these students will eventually recognize my efforts through their engagement in my lessons each day. This has not exactly worked out as planned, and insubordination is a daily occurrence that disrupts my classes.

I feel like I am being attacked each period on a daily basis. I am experiencing a complete conflict of identity as an educator and as a result I feel...I feel utterly *lost*. If I want to stay in this beautiful paradise any longer, perhaps it's time to look at other career options...

How does a school culture become this toxic? The loud, deep sound of laughter emerging from the corner of the classroom brings me back to reality and my present circumstances. It seems as if a group of students has turned on a computer, without permission, and are browsing the internet. A quick glance at the clock that is positioned about the marker board reveals that it is 8:20 in the morning. Here we are; it's the first period of the school day. 21 of the 44 students who are enrolled in this 'Modern Hawaiian History' class are currently missing. Some will trickle in unapologetically with their pink tardy passes over the next half-hour – this I am sure of. They will find a seat in this filthy classroom. I tried to gain rapport early on in the Semester by allowing them to select their own seats, justifying this decision to the class through an explanation of how I viewed them as 'adults'. They probably wonder, as I do, why the floor has not been mopped once since we started the semester on January 5th.

Thinking deeper, I realize that this underwhelming setting represents 'reality' for them. These students take the classroom condition for granted; it is all they know. Most seem unaware that a clean classroom is not a decision in other settings, how there are rules to which people are held accountable to each day. Reflecting on the past reveals that perhaps it is my perception, not the school, which has changed. Poor budgeting during my first tenure here had resulted in the absence of paper towels in most of the restrooms for the duration of the school year.

The condition of our school reinforces a norm within it: In this place, rules are situational. Teachers here shape and mold school policy to fit the realities of their context. And it is often a necessary decision in order to meet the various expectations in lieu of the various factors over which we have no control. Yet the inconsistency of what we know to be appropriate behavior, which also results from this practice, undermines us all. It's sort of sad how we acclimate to and accept our conditions as 'true'. The message that students receive based upon the condition of our school and the lack of structure is one of choice as well. This might explain why tardiness, cutting class, and arriving unprepared occur at such a high volume and so frequently.

I realize that I am drifting off into my thoughts again and refocus my energy on the present. I am aware that of the 21 students present this morning, only four are prepared for their presentations on the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment. I designed this lesson with the students of this class in mind – they are the 'living curriculum' today. *Why don't they appreciate the hours of extra effort I put in to make this topic come alive?* We are studying the Hawaiian Renaissance and instead of the routine name, dates, and other facts, I plan to support them as they tap into and share their own cultural capital... I want them to understand that they matter. Judging from the lack of engagement in this classroom, it seems that my attempt at critical pedagogy is falling short of everyone's expectations.

I am growing more and more frustrated.

A glance around the room shows that only a few students are aware that I have completely stopped teaching. The vast majority students have their ear-buds in and are listening to music or playing games on their cell phones. I glance to the left-hand corner of this vacuous space and become aware that Larissa is actually on the phone with someone! *Why do I even care? Chances are that nobody is going to come in our classroom this morning. It's not worth the stress.* But the frustration is still present. *I know if someone does enter the classroom, I will be held accountable.* I wish that I did not care so much; that I did not stay up so late last night in order to make the curriculum more relevant. I receive nothing for doing this, not even recognition. I do this for you, Larissa.

I stand up and stare at her silently for over a minute before she looks up at me across the room. As I am waiting for her to acknowledge me, I cannot help but think about the sheer lack of respect she has demonstrated all semester – moving her desk from the circle I've aligned before class to the far corner of the room each day, cursing at me on multiple occasions when I've asked her to comply with basic school norms... I would even accept kindness over respect, or perhaps courtesy. Never though. My frustration shifts to anger as I think about her parents... *how could they allow this to happen? Do they even attempt to parent? Or, does this behavior continue at home unabashed?* Back in January, Larissa told me about how her father said that her teachers must show her respect before she has to give any back to them. *Why would her father encourage this type of behavior?*

I am not seeking the answers to any of these questions; in my mind, they are accusatory statements. No explanation is needed. Phone calls and emails have gone unanswered for weeks. The administration is clearly too overwhelmed with the recent spike in vandalism and other discipline issues to offer any type of meaningful support. And, we just lost a Vice-Principal for the rest of the school year for reasons that are unclear. As is the norm, this is my issue to handle. My logic is simple: Larissa has her phone out, which is against school policy. And it's not just out. She is not silently text messaging, as is the form. No, she is talking on it as I watch. This is incredibly disrespectful, and she is not even trying to hide it. I stare at her for what feels like a full minute until my eye contact is met by Larissa's. I loudly ask her – with a tint of frustration in my voice – “What are you DOING”? By the time I got to the word ‘doing’, I realize that I am practically yelling. Once again, I am aware that this is not a question. The accusatory tone in my voice completely negates any perception that any appropriate answer might exist.

Feeding off of my energy Larissa blurts back “ACTUALLY, I’m talking to my MOM!”

Is that really her rationale?

I can't believe it... she thinks that it is okay to openly break the school rules that Maria, our Principal, just preached about for an entire hour during the last faculty meeting. I shake my head, acknowledging to myself that this is a losing battle. I smirk as I walk away because one of my mother's favorite quotes is running through my mind: *Lord, grant me the strength to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.* I have survived this encounter without being cursed at or threatened. I despise these more than anything. I refuse to accept curses and threats as just yet another form of pushing the

limits to explore boundaries. They are bullying; forms of abuse that affect my personal life. The stress and anxiety that they generate are not left at the front gate when the final bells rings.

And you are not worth that burden. *I wish that I could believe that.* I don't want to worry the rest of your afternoon. About where you will be after school and who you will be with. And I don't want to worry about whether or not you have dinner this evening. Or about what thoughts your father is putting in your mind. Or even how confusing it must be to navigate the conflict between the beliefs and values of home and those of school. But I will. I do even when you don't abuse me, which is why I'm so frustrated.

Oh. Worried *about* you? Like, fearful of seeing you tomorrow? I see.

Not a chance. How else would we be able to make up?

I fear the curses and threats for a different reason. The extent of their damage is largely invisible. I lose a bit a hope when this occurs; a little bit of motivation. In them. In their parents. In this school. *Why bother?* And when these things diminish, so does my grip on the sense of purpose I had only six months prior. Because I can't bury the thoughts that follow. They tell me that this place is not *it*. You don't need this. Still in transition. No resolution. Uncertainty. Ultimately, of failure. You should have done a better job of handling your emotions at the private school. You burned out. Who cares about placing blame? Right now, it's quiet over there. The students are in their uniforms, and the sun is just beginning to emerge over the mountains on the east side of valley. The campus appears golden as the bright rays of the sun reflect off of the wet grass.

It's been a tough few months, and not because of anything these kids have done. I have not made sense of what happened over there yet. I have been avoiding it by diving into my work here. The show went on without me. *Who really won?* It was about so much more than wanting to focus on my doctorate, as my father often reminds me in his typical half-full worldview. I felt like the ultimate team player, but even the most prepared can get injured if left in the game too long. I never came out.

Boundaries. This is an issue in all areas of my life. Always the giver. Always the healer. The only level I know seems to be 'everything'. Whether in relationships or in school contexts, there are risks to giving 'everything' because it does not leave room to receive much in return. This puts me in a position to be taken advantage of, but I only feel deserving when I am in this space. It's what dad does. Steve does it too. But mom, since the burnout she tells me that while giving your all is wonderful, there is no giving your all to more than one other. Divvy it up. Don't go too overboard.

But any thought of where I still believe that I should be is painful. I have new strategy to avoid these instances. John told me to think about my interests and passions as means of disengaging from the conflicts that present themselves in my head and in the classroom each day. We taught together here years ago before he made the jump to a private school as well. I remember when he told me. I must have been on the computer searching for myself only minutes later. Ten years older than me, I trust his judgment and envy his outlook on life. Without a hint

of humor in his voice he had asserted, “My wife, my surfboard, and beer. In that order.” He was describing his priorities in life. His job as an English teacher did not make this list. And John is a great teacher. But clearly, he has balance. *He doesn’t go overboard.*

I cannot think about John without thinking about surfing. He is my proverbial surf-buddy, for years joining me each day after school to rinse the stresses of classroom teaching away. I have been slacking lately. But I can always count on him to join me in the future. *I might even go surfing after school today. It’s going to be a good day after all.*

As I am beginning to gradually feel better – burying the guilt of not being able to truly ‘reach’ many of these students through some positive thinking about my own passions outside of the classroom. One day, I will be married. I will be finished with the doctorate. This is my dream. I could probably have met someone already. This would inch me closer to satisfying the desire to be married. But it doesn’t feel like I am where I need to be yet. When I am married, I want to be free to focus completely on my significant other. There will be no 2:30 AM bedtimes on a weeknight or waking up exhausted the following morning. Giving my ‘everything’ will mean something much different then. Something more rewarding than work. Some girls have tried to take me in that direction, but their careers were in full swing already. Not ready. Not yet.

But a look around the classroom proves I am fooling myself. This guilt hangs like a cloud over my person-hood. I can never seem to do enough to satisfy myself. If I had a normal life, perhaps my perspective would change. But for now, these kids are my life. *I can do better for them.*

I decide to change it up. The class needs to laugh, to move. They could use some energy. I am about to announce the shift in direction when.

What is that?

In the back of the classroom, Ann Marie and a few of the boys from class are playing a card game. There’s something in the middle of the desks that they have pushed together. *Money.* Are they... gambling.... in the classroom? I am about to intervene when one of the boys jumps up in excitement, screaming loudly as he raises his hands in the air. Loud enough for the entire building to hear. The snarky teacher next door can hear; the one who pretentiously walks into this classroom on a regular basis to inform “us” all of something “we” need to change. These students represent me. *I was feeling disrespected. I was frustrated.*

But now I’m *pissed off*. I’m angry. The students in the back had made a choice. A conscious decision that I interpret as “You don’t matter”. The instructional strategies I utilize to avoid directly addressing negative behaviors are forgotten. The importance of avoiding direct confrontation disregarded. I’ve seen many students gambling on campus this year, but not in my own classroom.

“Hey! Why are you doing that? You all know that it’s not okay to do that here!”

Ann Marie tries to play a final hand in direct opposition to my order.

“Ann Marie, I’ll speak with you after class!” I have had enough of her disrespectful attitude this week. I would not have to redirect her so often if she followed the school guidelines. Plus, I have read her IEP and am familiar with her needs. It’s my job to ensure she sits close to the front of the classroom just as it to ensure that she receives printed copies of class notes and extra time on certain assignments. She was at the meeting when we reviewed this a month ago. In my mind, I construct the discourse I would like to have with Ann Marie. The discourse I will not have with her because any challenges to her actions or behavior are met with aggressive, combative acts of resistance. *Why do you arrive in my classroom each day angry? That actually takes effort. You have to think about how to demonstrate that throughout class. You know this, right? It seems like wasted effort to me. Plus, it’s sort of ridiculous. I have demonstrated time and time again that I care about you. I am not your enemy. I wish that you would stop getting in your own way.*

Nalu lifts his head from the desk he occupies.

“Mister you ALWAYS picking on them! You treat everyone like GARBAGE! I’m not gonna take it anymore!” he shouts bitterly.

Of all people. I think to myself as I prepare to quell the situation a bit.

His eyes say something different though. They are not angry. I don’t sense the emotion at all; Nalu is acting. His eyebrows are drawn slightly downwards and together, his lips tightened together and pulled slightly upwards and backwards. He is apprehensive yet combative at the same time. This is just more manipulation. But it has been so consistent, and so intentional. He is a sociopath.

But who would believe me? The story sounds insane. It would not happen in a public school. It could not! The teacher’s cause any ill behaviors on behalf of students.

Nalu has single-handedly made my job so much more challenging this semester. I have observed him long enough to feel confident in my determination that he is someone who I had to be very careful around. Nalu represented more than a student in a desk. His expectations. His intentions. His abilities... those were to be respected, not praised.

Nalu is manipulative. He sweet-talked a few other teachers earlier in the semester, getting my phone number and then making the decision to send me text messages on weekends inquiring into my plans for the upcoming week. It felt invasive, yet the school administration’s inaction makes me feel almost guilty for not ‘partnering’ with him.

Nalu is now standing up. His body language indicates that he is yelling louder and with more intensity. Odd feelings of disassociation have already begun to wash over me. I am numb and detached. *I need to be assertive. Muster up some courage!* But there is no point. I will not argue with a teenager. And this teenager, in particular, relishes the idea of exercising attempts at power. The audience factor appears to motivate him even further. I’m aware that this pattern of

oppositional behavior usually triggers other students as well. I need to defuse the situation immediately.

It sets in that I will have to explain this to Ms. Jones. *Now I feel disgust and anger.* If our students and their families despise *you*, how can they get behind *us*? I am upset because I will not receive support from the administration. I do not want to win; I want this to be over. But I *know* that Nalu will skate away from this incident without punishment. He has defied the logic of school discipline all semester. *What is wrong with this school? What a mess!*

Nalu indicates that he is extremely upset at my “attacks” on his friends. I stand accused of writing referrals for a number students who did not comply with the reaffirmed school policy guidelines - policy that “no other teacher follows except for *YOU!*”

Now I am getting upset. I can feel the heat running up my cheeks. Teaching at this school is a ‘lose-lose’ proposition. A teacher’s worst nightmare. Walking on eggshells day after day is not worth it anymore. I cannot fix these issues; I am doing too much as it is.

Ann Marie’s voice chimes in from the back of the room, “YEAH! \$*&%YOU! You treat us like **** every day!”

Why is she so angry at me? She just ate lunch with me last week and all seemed fine. We even listened to some music and talked about her basketball team. Finally, Larissa and her friend - whose name I cannot recall because she has missed over three-quarters of our classes this semester – begin in as well. *I’ve lost control of a class for the first time in my career. I’m supposed to be at the top of my game, an elite teacher. Why am I regressing?*

Class has now grinded to a complete halt. All of the students are paying attention. Ironically, I am aware that this is one of the few occasions all year that they are all engaged.

Initial Analysis

“It is in the experiencing of difference that we experience who we are. And in our awareness comes knowing; and with knowing, development of our identity” (Romano, 2014, p. 72).

The initial analysis of this critical incident proved difficult due to the wide-range of emotions that I carried in the months afterwards. The initial aftermath of this episode can be best characterized by my feelings of anger and frustration that stemmed from the actions of the students involved, as well as from what I perceived to be a gross lack of support from the school administration leading up to and after the incident took place. Initial attempts at reflection were all too often interrupted by these emotions, which subsequently led me down a path of blame and

victimization. Many of my colleagues suggested that I just ‘let it go’, attributing this conflict to the technicalities and idiosyncrasies that characterize the teaching profession – the time of day, lack of preparation on the part of students, etc. The day after, a coworker put her hand on my shoulder in a gesture of solidarity and assurance before stating “In Hawaii, these types of things happen from time to time”. While I was gracious to receive this supportive gesture, I was also aware that my colleague’s discourse represented an attempt to normalize the traumatic experience I had endured. Clearly, there was more to this critical incident than surface-level speculation could possibly justify.

I begin by acknowledging that this was a difficult situation to walk into and aim to provide a brief layer of context to better situate the reader. The former teacher of the students storied here was actually my replacement; when I accepted a teaching position at a private school, he took over my former line. This consisted of teaching general social studies courses in addition to coordinating and teaching a largely autonomous, very distinctive health-related program which was often referred to in whispers around campus as the ‘dumping ground’ for students with no other options. Reasons for students’ limited options included failing grades, behavioral issues, and less commonly, those who transferred into the school too late to earn credit in core courses. The administration’s expectation of the teacher is to provide students with much needed structure while covering topics associated with the promotion of healthy behaviors. Today, I position running this program as the most rewarding experience of my entire career. However, I must also acknowledge that working with this particular population of students also ranks highly amongst the most challenging experiences of my career.

One month into the school year, their original teacher had decided to quit the profession. For reasons I am unaware of, a permanent substitute was not hired to replace the former teacher. Instead, the students faced a new substitute teacher multiple times each week. Almost universally, the standard procedure (or at least good practice indicates) for a teacher-absence involves the teacher's generation of lesson plans for use by the substitute teacher. As one might have reasonably assumed, the former teacher did not leave any plans for future substitutes. Ultimately, I would come to perceive this single variable (no lesson plans) as the root of most of the conflicts described within this analysis. The lesson-plan dilemma, as we will refer to it, was never adequately addressed because of a unique challenge it presented. Let's work through this logic together: The individual who was responsible for creating plans each day has quit the profession. *Check*. Members of the former teacher's department and school administrators alike are not contractually-bound to perform extra duties, such as this task. *Check*. So, who is left to assume this responsibility? This fell upon the only party not mentioned yet: substitute teachers. *Check*. However, substitute teachers are contractually protected from assuming these type of "full time" duties. As such, the expectation of substitutes was to maintain order during the free, unstructured time that was unofficially labeled as 'study hall'.

Before delving into further detail just yet, I ask the reader to join me as I briefly fast-forward to my arrival in the month of January. The environment which I entered and the experiences that would follow can be understood through a variety of conceptual and theoretical lenses. However, initial attempts at sense-making rarely proceed in a linear fashion. The initial reflection honors the messy nature of this process, creating an unstructured space for reflection-on-action (Schön, 1986) to occur. Naturally, this section locates my focus on the unsettling elements of my overall experience. As an educator with experience in a number of diverse

settings, I carried with me the assumption that I had ‘seen it all’. Over time, I would realize that some elements of my new job were not just unordinary, but absolutely remarkable. Exasperated, I often pondered about how many other educators found themselves in similar positions, attempting to untangle the complex classroom dynamics located at the intersection of policy and institutional demands with critical elements such as context, culture, race, ethnicity, social positioning, etc. I offer an example: I entered this context unaware that a student enrolled in both of my content areas had gradually established himself as the teacher of both courses. Using the outdated resources strewn about the classroom, he taught lessons and even administered summative evaluations that were used by administrators to official grades. This student even brought in his neighbor as a guest speaker! Despite a history academic struggles and behavioral issues, those in power at school seemed to embrace him in this role. When I eventually came to learn that the school administration encouraged these efforts, I did not problematize the practice. Instead, I rationed that any structure was certainly better than no structure. On the other hand, and as time would reveal, the administration either did not think about, or chose to ignore, the impact that the experience would have on this particular student’s beliefs, values, and perceptions. In a nutshell, to claim that this student did not respond “well” to the reality of once having a permanent teacher would be a great understatement.

My initial analysis is driven by a simple question: *Why do these students think that I am a jerk?* The actions of the students storied in this vignette clearly demonstrate a shared-perception of myself as abusive, oppressive, and uncompassionate – characteristics, which sit in stark contrast to that of my own self-perception as a supportive, dedicated, open-minded educator. After all, since returning to this school I had been burning the proverbial candle on ‘both ends’; laboring day and night in the effort to provide students with engaging, authentic, and meaningful

learning experiences. My intention was to empower students, not oppress them. I adopted the role of the facilitator, rearranging desks from regimental rows to an open circle. As a class, we co-constructed a new set of class norms and participated in philosophical discussions about topics related to students' lives. A collaborative, project-based learning model replaced the traditional, individualistic book-work model that students had grown accustomed to. A shift in favor of formative assessment and individualized feedback demonstrated to all students a renewed emphasis on effort and resilience over that of ability. Students, I had presumed, believed that they had a 'voice' in this classroom. On the basis of my actions alone, the negative perceptions held by my students' seemed to defy all logic and reasoning. In addition, the specific group of students storied in this vignette were all very much aware of the additional efforts that I was taking on their behalf. Even those who were unimpressed and uninspired with my reimagined, student-centered curriculum conveyed that they felt respected, cared for, and protected.

I had built a successful teaching career upon the very same principles described above. In all other educational settings, this model correlated with my popularity amongst students. While teaching is certainly not a popularity contest, the result of cultivating positive rapport and supportive relationships with students draws many parallels to such. I had earned a reputation as a flexible and empathetic teacher, someone whom students could let their guard down around and be true to themselves without fear of judgment. I listened to their personal stories, acknowledged their voices, and offered an unconditional acceptance. Students were viewed as people, not empty vessels awaiting their fill of historical knowledge. My respective classrooms always seemed to be filled with students during those periods of time when their presence was not required: before school, during recess, at lunchtime, and after school. So what was the

difference between then and now? Why was there an absence of positive teacher-student relationships? Where did this unsettling sense of ‘distance’ between this particular group I begin? Against my own philosophy, I even pondered if perhaps these particular students were in fact the group of ‘punks’ and ‘brats’ that some students and teachers had labeled them as when confiding in me. While pacing around my apartment one afternoon, a new insight presented itself in the form of an old shoebox filled with letters from my former students. A primary theme emerged from the letters, shedding light on what I did *right*. All indicated the belief that I truly cared about them.

Reassessing the situation, I attempt to position myself through the collective student-held lens as the ‘uncaring individual’. Although I am uncomfortable with this negative perception, I must embody this role. The ‘caring’ factor seems to be the only significant variable in this equation. What might I have done or said and to whom, the emotion hidden deep within me suddenly explodes, shouting loudly over the soft voice of logic, “*In various ways, I was seemingly left out to dry before, during, and after this critical incident occurred!*” Emotion has taken precedence now. Shifting the investigative lens back onto self, I ask myself “*What do you really think about these students?*” Almost automatically, my mind races through a process of associating students’ actions and behaviors with negative impacts on teaching and learning. These actions, I presume, justify my perception of the students as ungrateful, inconsiderate, and combative. Maintaining its tight grip on my judgment, emotion reminds me that other teachers and students reinforced this perception through sharing stories which implicated members of this particular group in similar disruptive acts. Here we go again.

I pause, aware that I am once again entering the unproductive cycle of placing blame for the purpose of serving a personal agenda. This agenda seeks to affirm fault as located entirely

with these students and the school administration. As the catalyst that continues to drive me into this cycle time and time again, I cannot help but begin to problematize emotion. Interestingly enough, it was through this seemingly off-task process that I was able to gain new perspectives necessary to move forward with my initial analysis.

Emotion provides meaning. When we attach significance to something, we attach feelings - not conclusions. Rationalism, with its carefully developed processes, can only tell us *what is*. Emotion enters the reasoning process to tell us *what should be*. This bit of insight directs my analysis towards the strong emotions exhibited by this particular group of students. Similarly, my deeply held emotions also reveal personal beliefs and values. I had carried an assumption that all of my students were well-aware of the ‘good’ intentions behind my motivation to redesign the course. I also assumed, as the result of experience, that the project-based approach of student-driven inquiry would shape the process of teaching and learning. As a facilitator, I largely neglected to reflect upon instructional methods because I had associated these with teacher-directed pedagogies. Or, perhaps I just ran out of time after building this new curriculum from the ground up. Regardless, the interactions between the students and myself went largely unexamined. In turn, I became aware that my actions could have been interpreted differently than what I had intended by these students.

In an online interview, Ladson-Billings (as cited in Au, 2005) provides insight that served to spur my renewed perspective, ultimately breaking the stalemate of placing blame. She argues:

Part of being highly qualified as a teacher is that you actually understand kids, you understand community, you understand context — so that you go into a setting and you're able to

understand enough about the setting, enough about yourself, to be able to be effective...

Although my initial attempts at sense-making were marked by an awareness of race, ethnicity, and class positioning, deeply entrenched cultural assumptions served to color my perception of these students in a negative, deficit-laden hue. I had deemed their actions as inexcusable. Unconsciously, I had positioned myself as a neutral actor, stripped of the associations inherent to the possession of specific social identities. The “hidden” nature of White identity, which is grounded in the dynamics of dominant group status, afforded me the unconscious and unearned privilege of conflating race with culture. Like many Whites, I struggled to see myself as White, instead viewing Whiteness as bland and cultureless. Fitzgerald (2015) describes White privilege as:

...the privilege to *not* think about race, the privilege to *not* recognize the dominant culture as White culture rather than as racially neutral, and the privilege to overlook the fact that Whiteness, rather than being absent, is ever present as the unnamed norm. (p. 57)

Unaware, I painted myself as merely a pawn of the larger educational institution itself. The institution existed on a foundation of specific beliefs and values for which I was but a vessel. Because of my perception of the ideologies that drive western education (democracy, meritocracy) as nothing less than absolute truths, I perpetuated them as well. After all, I had struggled to “adapt” into the confines of these beliefs and values as well. On top of this, I even possessed a self-awareness of my own privilege, albeit a misguided notion. I ‘recognized’ how my parents did a much better job of cultivating within me these qualities than that of my

students' families. However, having more or less been in "their shoes", I believed that I was more than prepared to help these students get ahead.

Alarming, this sentiment reflects that of Kipling's (1899) poem "The White Man's Burden", which justified Euro-American imperialism as a noble enterprise of civilization. In brief, the poem proposes that the White man has a moral obligation (and is divinely destined) to civilize (rule) the inferior non-White peoples of the Earth through acts of colonization. I self-perceived as one who was serving a group "inferior" students for whom navigating the system proved difficult. Armed with a consciousness of myself as a racial being, I begin to investigate how race, ethnicity, and class ultimately shaped this critical incident. Only through the investigation of my own process of racialization within a separate vignette was I able to begin identifying the impact of race, ethnicity, and class positioning on my actions. With each renewed act of reflection, the interplay between these constructs became more visibly defined.

Critical Catalyst

Roughly a month into this experience, a sense of tension was already present between Nalu and myself. He was failing in my Modern Hawaiian History class largely because he did not turn in a significant number of assignments. I wanted to support him in catching up but he always seemed to be missing. His father summed up the situation best during a phone call I had made to address various concerns. "He needs to respect authority", he said. The measures I had already taken to remedy the issue had little effect. I had dutifully marked him as "late" in the attendance system most days, which was in addition to the high number of absences he had accumulated. More than anything, I was confused. On multiple occasions I had observed Nalu to be physically present at school yet absent from each of my classes. Remarkably, his name was never listed amongst the long line of others on the daily detention roster. I had noted this to the vice-principal in charge of discipline more than once. She was very polite, each time ending our

conversation by assuring me that “I’ll talk to him about this”. The rules did not seem to apply equally to all students.

In an effort to gain clarity, I approached Nalu as he walked into my classroom one morning.

“Hey bud,” I began, “What can I do to help you catch up on the assignments that you’ve missed?”

Without pause, Nalu confidently responded. “Oh, those! Don’t worry about it Mr. P.” He continued, I’ll have them in soon.”

Perhaps he sensed that I knew more than I was letting on. Or, maybe he interpreted my question as coming from a place of suspicion. Heck, he might have felt downright guilty. Regardless, my hesitation to respond left him unsatisfied.

With a hint of defensiveness, he added, “I do a lot of work for the student government association. Before you arrived, I had organized an entire school assembly”.

Nalu was used to relying on his quick-wits and charm. I was beginning to understand how this helped him to stay ‘under the radar’. He had the local women who worked in the front office “eating out of his hand” some days. *He’s good*, I acknowledge. But my next statement reflected none of this accumulated knowledge. Instead, it flowed off my lips naturally before I could stop it and think further, the result ‘truths’ cultivated over many years spent teaching students Nalu’s age.

“But you aren’t a member of the student government organization, Nalu”.

This was true; a fact which Nalu would not be able to ignore. I did not make this inference because of my knowledge that students in that organization were required to maintain excellent grades. I knew this because of the special passes that the group’s faculty advisor left in

our mailboxes each day. Further, large photographs of each student who had earned the honor of serving in this very small group were displayed prominently in the front office of our school.

This, I assumed, was common knowledge.

Nalu did not receive this message well. His face was blank. It was as if my words were a physical blow which prevented Nalu from immediately activating his usually reliable quick-thinking skills.

You are not here to knock kids down, I remind myself. I need to level this playing field immediately in order to ease Nalu's defensive nature. I sit in a desk next to where Nalu is standing to establish an equal eye level.

Breaking the silence, I butt in, "Listen man, I'm new here and have not taught this specific content before." I add "You know that you can tell me when I am unclear or when you are not enjoying our projects".

Internally, I believe that I am handing him the equivalent of a 'free pass'; an open door to somewhere other than this current, highly uncomfortable situation. I know he feels exposed right now.

Quite a few of his classmates have pulled me aside during the last few weeks, each more or less expressing gratitude for a number of different reasons. *Making the animation was fun... I like how you can joke about yourself in front of us... It was really powerful when we talked about race during the class discussion... I am finally learning stuff again... You scrub!* Nalu is aware of this; I have subtly observed the way he watches me so intently during one-on-one interactions with other students. When I am aware, an apprehensiveness takes hold of me. Until now, I have avoided acknowledging that this sneaky, surreptitious behavior makes me feel uneasy.

Although Nalu portrays himself as more than capable, I know that he struggles with reading comprehension and writing. These are the skills that federal and state policy measures have identified as important to success. Nalu is aware that his performance in these areas will be tied to my rating as an educator in our state. I know because he told me as such. When I do assign work that falls into these areas, Nalu tends to act out – talking to others, pretending to fall asleep, even leaving the classroom. Ultimately, he will confidently reassure me that the assignment will be completed as he leaves class at the end of the period.

But there are rules here. Strict rules. They are not new, and I certainly did not create them. But I am held to them.

Nalu is well-aware that he is not supposed to walk out of the classroom without a pass. Many of these events were covered by the media. There have been 3 fires set in the boy's bathrooms already this semester. When the smell of smoke filled into our classroom last week, my students responded in such an efficient, precise manner that I could not help but be impressed. I'm not sure how I feel about their familiarity with the process anymore. Vandalism plagues our campus; graffiti is everywhere and the destruction of property is common. I've stopped putting up new bulletin boards on the wall outside of my classroom because each will inevitably be ripped down. A student even smashed the front door to the main office a few weeks ago. And then there was the superglue incident last week. I watched as the maintenance workers sent in by the state worked so hard all day, hacking and chipping away at the locks on each door in the attempt to pry them open. Who knew how effective this cheap adhesive would be at keeping us out of our classrooms for the entire day.

I believe that Nalu knows precisely why I must to adhere to the school guidelines. Yet simultaneously, I can tell that he genuinely feels targeted. We inhabit a blurry space between two

contradictory positions. How many times have I attempted to explain this to him? *The guidelines apply to equally to everyone, Nalu.*

At times, I wonder if Nalu is occupying this contested space on purpose; if our interactions are actually intentional pieces of a power struggle that he wages each day. Perhaps I was too quick to interpret our lack of direct confrontation as an indication that Nalu was a ‘good’ kid. Try as I might, it is difficult not to take personally the explosive anger and classroom outbursts of students that occur with alarming regularity here. The traumatic nature of these events has likely contributed to an unconscious polarization of who is genuinely a ‘good’ student and who is not. Maybe Nalu avoids direct confrontations on purpose, as this colors his passive-aggressive attempts to engage me in negotiations as something else. This frustrates me. I don’t feel comfortable keeping my guard up all day.

Accountability measures demoralize me.

All of the students know that the administration keeps teachers accountable. It is no secret that they come and collect our bathroom logs at the end of the month. Each time a student requests the pass, I am obligated by rule to stop what I am doing and complete a bathroom log entry. This “ritual” consists of flipping through the pages, locating the current date, and finally the class roster. The grid that sits next to the roster is to be bubbled where the student’s name and current date match. Roughly fifty students populate each of my classes. Of that, I would estimate that ten to fifteen of them request to use the bathroom on a typical day. It is difficult enough to engage such a large number of teenagers. Similar to a traffic jam, the “ritual” dictates a stop and go pace which has proven disruptive to the steady flow of learning. Instead, learning is often fragmented. Deep down, I don’t fault students for engaging in off-task behavior. However, gaining the attention of a large class requires a lot in the way of redirection.

Nalu knows that I am not a fan of these measures. I am not a rigid disciplinarian. My take on redirection confirms this; I frame these statements in a manner that targets a behavior, not the individual student. Further, I provide rationale for the redirection itself. I have begun using narration techniques as well, describing the behavior of on-task students without using value-laden words.

The majority of my students apologize when redirected. Nalu takes it very personally as if I am out to get him.

Nalu's voice cuts off my internal dialogue, "I don't like your White way of teaching".

Critical Analysis: Layer 1

I was furious. During the heat of the exchange described above, I dismissed Nalu's comment as a convenient, self-serving excuse. Through my subjective lens, Nalu was provided with a reasonable and easily-accessible exit from the situation at hand; a centrally located 'front door' to walk out of. Instead, it felt as if he chose to barge through the wall instead. I had seen and heard enough. Invisible labels were now affixed to my perception of him; disingenuous and duplicitous. These served as a filter, allowing me to negate his sentiment. The subtle acts of deception and passive-aggressive gestures characteristic of this larger power struggle had taken a toll on my patience. I associated an acknowledgment of Nalu's perception with the invalidation my own.

The mechanical nature of my immediate interpretation of Nalu's sentiment as an attack proves remarkable. I had come into the teaching profession with desires to impart knowledge and foster social change. However, as with most White teachers, I lacked a clear understanding of the White dominance, White power, and White privilege in which American education is deeply rooted (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Through his description of my pedagogy as "White", Nalu effectively placed a spotlight directly on my own racial and cultural identity, causing me

considerable fear and discomfort. What I *heard* was an accusation of racism. I was taking what I reasoned to be appropriate measures in order to protect myself from an individual of malicious intent. In fairness, I would come to learn that this student did in fact possess a complicated agenda which resulted from number of external factors unrelated to this particular issue. As a professor to whom I described this situation reminded me, ‘Some students are just *brats*, plain and simple’.

Race matters. The defensiveness which characterized my reaction to Nalu’s decision to reference raciality highlights the presence of power differentials. The color-blind ideology which serves as the dominant form of racial discourse in the United States privileges my ‘neutral’ perspective. My emotionally-charged response is characteristic of what Leonardo (2002) deems “racial avoidance discourse”, appeared justified at the time. Immediately, I produced an emotional defensive. Nalu’s history of poor behavior was justification for my decision to disregard his sentiment. Although unaware, acknowledging his idea would also be to recognize the differentially beneficial nature of White status. The racial avoidance discourse that I had knowingly yet unknowingly inherited as the result of almost two decades of formal schooling reveals itself through my decision to suddenly ‘see’ race again as my choosing. Acknowledging that I had plenty of experience with racial and ethnic diversity, I rejected Fuller’s (1994) notion of ignorant White teacher’s experienced only in mono-cultural environments. Frankenberg (1993) explains, “This discursive repertoire is organized around evading difference or acknowledging it selectively, rather than literally not ‘seeing’ differences of race, culture, and color” (p. 76). My experiences led me to believe that I could *decide* when I wanted to be color blind.

In a culture that bewails schooling in response to our nation's educational deficiencies, and where accountability reform measures serve to institutionally reinforce a collective perception of schools and teachers as primarily responsible for our nation's social and economic ills, such a position is contested. Teachers were not supposed to feel these types of emotions about students. We are supposed to see the 'good' in everyone. I doubted myself, an affirmation of the grip held over my subjectivities by the normative discourse. In sum, this doubt opened the door to an investigation of Nalu's statement: *'The White way of teaching'*. The incident described above provides a starting point for the critical investigation of many elements that color identity politics in Hawai'i. When I attempt to make-sense of this critical incident, I cannot do so without thinking about race, ethnicity, and social positioning. How do these categories operate in a normative way? So long as there are power differentials, these categories serve as salient frameworks for understanding subjectivity. Student subjectivities are rationalized and accommodated to existing regimes of truth. That is, my reaction to Nalu's decision to reference raciality highlights the presence of power differentials as well as complexity of identity in Hawai'i. While unpacking my own White privilege would take additional reflection on numerous critical incident, this initial act of critical analysis opened up a space to position my identity and investigate 'local'.

The ethnic and cultural perspective of Hawai'i can be best described as *nuanced*. To those visiting the islands of Hawai'i today, it becomes quickly apparent that the amount of racial diversity is immense. At a glance, Hawai'i's citizens embody the physical and cultural characteristics that advocates of multiculturalism dream about. Yet if one was to scratch below the surface of Hawai'i's pluralistic culture, he or she would become aware that the tolerance, peaceful coexistence, harmonious ethnic relations, equality of opportunity and status, and shared

local culture and identity highlighted by politicians and the tourism industry alike serve as a veneer (Okamura, 2008). This discourse, which has been deemed the “racial harmony model” (Rohrer, 2006) and/or the “multicultural model” (Okamura, 2008), has been highlighted by the previously mentioned parties for decades. Promoting Hawai‘i as a place characterized by equality, sensitivity, and opportunity for all peoples, these parties seek to benefit their own agendas (Rohrer, 2006). Reflection through a critical lens opens a space to challenge the benevolent myth of Hawai‘i as a multicultural paradise devoid of expectations, rigid hierarchies, and prejudices.

The dominant culture in Hawai‘i is difficult to assess. Hawai‘i is a state where all residents are technically a minority. According to the United States Census, the racial makeup of Hawai‘i’s population is 37.3% Asian, 9.9% Native Hawai‘i an and Pacific Islander, 26.7% White, 10.4% Hispanic or Latino of any race, 2.6% Black or African American, and 0.3% American Indian and Native Alaskan. A statistic that is of particular relevance to this analysis is the percentage of people who identify themselves in the category of two or more races. In Hawai‘i that percentage is 23% compared with 2.6% in the United States as a whole (“United States Census 2015”). While the high intermarriage rate among Hawai‘i residents can serve as an indicator of their collective openness toward diversity and willingness to challenge social boundaries, social inequalities do exist.

Although racialization plays a significant role the identity politics of Hawai‘i, there exists a distinct “local” identity that marks cultural insiders from cultural outsiders. This is primarily based upon cultural guidelines which vary due to the complexity of social stratification in Hawai‘i. Rohrer (2008) denominates three racial categories that serve as major identity markers in Hawai‘i: Kanaka Maoli (Native Hawaiians), locals, and haoles. Reed (2001) describes the

spectrum of ‘local’ identity, stipulating, “Depending on the situation, and depending on the power relationships at the moment, it fits somewhere along the continuum of ‘mainland’ to ‘local’” (p.186). The term ‘mainland’ refers to the dominant American culture that is largely defined by European values and styles of interaction. In direct contrast, the term ‘local’ suggests the Polynesian and Asian values and interactional styles of generations of Hawai‘i residents. The sheer number of distinct ethnicities that fall under the umbrella that is the racial category of ‘Asian’ serves as an example of why the definition of ‘local’ is subject to much debate. Cultural differences in Hawai‘i, explains Reed, generally “...seem to align Asian and Pacific Island groups in collective contrast to US mainland values and interactive styles” (p. 328). Being accepted or passing as ‘local’ is a distinction far from equally accessed by all members of Hawaiian society and has tremendous classroom implications. To understand what accounts for this variation means to engage in a complex social exploration balancing ethnicity, race, class, indigeneity, context, and more. All have imparted unique definitions, stereotypes, and boundaries on the concept of a ‘local’ identity in Hawai‘i (Wilson, 2009).

As a Caucasian male living and teaching in Hawai‘i, I am identified as a ‘haole’ – a term that meant “without breath” or “foreigner” in the Hawaiian language when British Captain James Cook arrived in 1778; it now means “White person”. Reed (2001) explains “The pan-ethnic category of ‘Caucasian’ or *Haole* is often misdesignated as an ‘ethnicity’ in common parlance when listed with other ethnicities like Chinese, Japanese and Filipino” (p. 331). A multifaceted concept, haole is much more than a noun such as ethnicity. Rohrer (2005) describes haole as more than a “definable delimited person/group”, instead describing the term as “[...] contingent, performative, and multivalent” (p. 2). The dominant popular discourse in the islands equates all haoles in one group characterized by a colonial past, capitalism, racism, militarism, and

globalization (Ohnuma, 2002). Rohrer (2005) explains, “Haole has always been multiple and contingent, it’s meaning varying with constituency, time and place” (p. 64). Most commonly, haoles lumped into the ‘non-local’ category due to the aforementioned identity politics of racialization. As a result, the exploration of my teacher identity construction in Hawai‘i is less aimed at trying to define what haole is and instead more focused upon exploring how it is produced in all its variance. In the context of this vignette, haole is a term that is historically situated and saturated with all of the negative stereotypes that characterize Whites in Hawai‘i.

Reed (2001) sums up identity formation in Hawai‘i concisely, asserting:

... local, non-local, and haole terminologies are imprecise and flexible... they are historically situated, continuously contested and partially rule driven. They sometimes depend as much on the cultivation of sensibilities and attitudes as they do on ethnic heritage and history. Their salience is derived from the meanings that insiders and outsiders infuse them with and from the work that insiders and outsiders do to fasten, unfasten and refasten. (p. 337)

Relationships between these groups are integral in identification and interactions, both positive and negative. The cultural differences between peoples, or in this case students and teachers, can create tension. Unexamined, this tension can have significant implications on both teaching and learning.

Education, in terms of quality and highest level achieved, plays a significant role in the perpetuation of inequality amongst ethnic groups in Hawai‘i. This serves to color the classroom interactions between students and teachers. An overview of the state’s public school system proves helpful to understanding the educational system’s role in perpetuating inequality amongst

ethnic groups in Hawai‘i. The Hawai‘i Department of Education is the only statewide system in the United States. Likewise, the system of financing public education is different from any other state. Thompson and Marlow (2000) highlight the two major differences: (1) no property tax funds are levied for the support of education and (2) there exists no constitutionally or legislatively prescribed formula for allocating funds to schools. In theory, Hawai‘i’s unique statewide funding system serves to eliminate the funding imbalances that result from school districts having differing property taxes and subsequently revenue. At a surface level, this system should provide equal opportunity for individual students, ethnic groups, and schools. In reality, the public education in Hawai‘i serves as a major factor in the institutionalization of ethnic inequality due to chronic underfunding. Okamura (2008) explains, “...since the 1970s the DOE schools have been receiving a declining proportion of the state budget and, consequently, the quality of education provided to students and the condition of the schools have deteriorated markedly” (p. 65). This has led to an educational system that is ranked among the lowest in the nation by various criteria.

There are currently 290 public schools in Hawai‘i distributed among the seven inhabited islands. In the 2015-2016 school year, enrollment was listed at 180,409 students (“Enrollment Data”). In terms of ethnicity, these students include Native Hawai‘i an (26%), Filipino American (22.1%), White (17%), Japanese American (9.1%), Hispanic (3.6%), Samoan (3.4%), Chinese American (3.1%), African-American (2.6%), Portuguese American (1.5%), and Korean American (1.4%) (“2015 Superintendent’s”). Thus, the socioeconomically subordinate groups, including Native Hawaiians, Filipino Americans, Latinos, Samoans, and other Pacific Islanders, comprise a majority of public school students. Okamura (2008) highlights that in contrast, the socioeconomically privileged ethnic groups, such as Whites, Japanese Americans, and Chinese

Americans, are much less represented in the public schools than they are in the state population and instead constitute a majority of the state's private school student population. Onshore High School serves an economically and racially diverse student population of about 900 students. Recent data indicates that 26.4% of the students attending the high school during the 2015-2016 school year were classified as disadvantaged through their qualification for free or reduced lunch ("Hawai'i Department of Education"). The student body is comprised of students representing eighteen ethnic groups, with a high percentage of students who are Caucasian (44.9%) and Hawai'ian or Part Hawai'ian (18.9%). Students representing other ethnic groups include Filipino, Hispanic, Japanese, Chinese, African American, Portuguese, Samoan, Korean, Indo-Chinese, Micronesian, Tongan, Chamorro, Native American, and All Other ranging from 7.1% down to 0.3%. While the percentage of White students appears significantly higher than the state average, one must take into account the military families from nearby Kaneohe Marine Corps Base who collectively represent about 28% of the student population.

As for the 11,222 teachers in Hawai'i's public schools, the largest ethnic group continues to be Japanese Americans (25.3%) and Whites (24.1%). They are followed by Hawaiian-Part Hawaiian (9.9%), Filipino Americans (6.4%), Chinese Americans (3.6%), Hispanic (1.3%), Korean Americans (1%), and African Americans (0.7%) ("2015 Superintendent's Annual Report"). From this, we can gather that the two largest groups among students - Native Hawaiians and Filipino Americans - are among the least employed as public school teachers. On the other hand, the two largest ethnic groups among teachers are far less represented as students in Hawai'i's public school system. The significant differences in the ethnic distribution between public school students and teachers is more than purely demographic, particularly when it comes to the learning styles of different cultures. Pertaining to the vignette, such unequal representation

led to a cultural mismatch that shaped the dynamics of my classroom. “Compounding this problem,” Okamura (2008) asserts, “the DOE recruits and hires several hundred teachers each year from the continental United States, who comprise a majority of the new teachers hired” (p. 66). These teachers, who are predominantly White and from middle-class backgrounds, often lack the cultural preparation to teach within the context of Hawai‘i’s public schools.

The conflict described in this vignette is the result of more than a disagreement between a group of students and a teacher. That is, the roots of this conflict, and many others, go beyond the walls of the classroom and to the context of teaching and learning Hawai‘i. Underfunding was a direct factor in my own classroom, where classes of 40-45 students were met by poor conditions that did not promote learning. Roughly one-quarter of the desks in my classroom were unusable. The floor was not swept or mopped for the duration of the semester, leading to an infestation of insects. Most notable was the dreaded cockroaches that brought my classes to a halt due to the inevitable yelling and general panic of students that followed. In addition, I could not obtain enough textbooks for all of the students in my Modern Hawaiian History classes. During my first tenure at this school, I had adapted to the conditions, accepting them as *normal*.

Yet it was now four years later. During this time period, I had witnessed the educational benefits and advantages that private school settings provided to their primarily Japanese American, White, and Chinese American students. These included smaller class sizes, better equipped and maintained classroom facilities, and current learning materials which serve to foster an educational environment that fosters student learning and achievement. Although it can be argued that all public school students suffer as a result of the inadequate funding of the Hawai‘i Department of Education – including those ethnic groups of privileged social status in Hawai‘i, the fact that ethnic minorities comprise most of the students in the public schools

negates such a position. About 37,000 students – roughly 17 percent of all Hawai‘i students – attend private schools, compared with about 11 percent nationally (“Private School Enrollment”, 2016). The average state-wide private school tuition for the 2015-2016 school year was \$8,663, a number that falls below the Hawai‘i Department of Education’s allocation of \$14,434 per pupil for the same year. However, those private schools with more selective admissions, including the two where I was employed, have tuitions that currently exceed \$20,000 per school year (“Private School Tuition”). Much like Okamura (2008), I argue that the conditions resulting from DOE policy constitute institutional discrimination against ethnic minorities because they are not being provided with equal educational opportunity. Families that are well-off are able to send their children to superior private schools while working-class families are forced to choose amongst inferior, under-funded public schools. This in turn perpetuates social stratification based on socioeconomic status. And since certain ethnic groups fall along the socio-economic hierarchy in different places, we must view ethnicity, class, and education as three variables all inextricably linked.

Before this critical incident occurred, I had long been aware that any one ‘local’ person exhibited only a small portion of the traits loosely linked with ‘local’ culture. For example, one could be considered local even if they did not enjoy eating musubi, a popular snack and lunch food in the islands consisting of a slice of lunch meat or fish – although usually grilled spam – that is laid atop a block of rice and wrapped together with nori, a dried seaweed in the tradition of Japanese *omusubi*. Similarly, an individual lacking *humility* could still be accepted as ‘local’ for other reasons. I had a recent conversation with a colleague who characterized himself simultaneously as local and non-local. To prove the former, this individual pointed out that he was born and raised in Hawai‘i, and speaks Hawaiian Creole English, also known as *pidgin*, a

local dialect that evolved from the increase in ethnic diversity due to waves of immigration during the plantation era. Yet he describes himself as ‘non-local’ by association as he did not identify with the ‘local’ crowd when growing up, nor does he consistently act ‘local’ for his professional job. By straddling two different cultures, this individual, as a third generation Japanese-American, eludes being any one cultural or ethnic definition. A deeper analysis of the incident described in this vignette leads to a search for diversity within the identity marker of ‘local’ as it relates interrelates and interconnects other forms of identity and social groupings. Two variables that stand in this matter are both class and ethnicity. Racial, ethnic, and class-based social labels have real consequences for the students and teachers of Hawai‘i alike, as well as the study of social stratification in the state. It is within the intersectionality of these identity markers that the root causes of this specific conflict can be found and subsequently from which action can be taken.

The critical incident storied here captures the dynamic nature of the intersections between ‘local’ culture, race, ethnicity, and class in Hawai‘i. More specifically, the interactions described in this vignette demonstrate the manner by which ‘local’ identity interplays with ethnic identity. Given the extraordinary diversity of immigrant groups in Hawai‘i, it comes as no surprise that ethnicity deeply influences one’s respective culture and identity. Hawai‘i’s first non-White immigrant group was the Chinese, who arrived in the mid-1800s. These were followed by the Portuguese (late 1800s), Japanese (late 1800s), Puerto Ricans (early 1900s), and Filipinos (early 1900s). Later immigrant groups to the islands include the Koreans and Vietnamese, amongst others. As a result, Hawai‘i features the highest “minority majority” in the country, with a population that is 70% non-White (“United States Census 2015”). This unique ethnic composite has played a primary role in the historic and contemporary shaping of ‘local’ identity and culture.

It is through the lens of those who bring their own histories to the islands as ethnic immigrants that ‘local’ is given its color (Wilson, 2009). Take for example Nalu, the sixteen-year-old Native Hawaiian student identified in this vignette. Nalu was born and raised on the windward side of Oahu, where Onshore High School is located. During a warm-up activity earlier in the school year, I projected a prompt onto the screen in front of the classroom that read ‘*What does it mean to be local?*’ Although my directions clearly indicated that student responses to the prompt were to be silently written for five minutes before sharing out in small groups, Nalu responded immediately, proclaiming, “Being local means not acting White!” Instead of redirecting Nalu to write his thoughts down – in an effort to perpetuate the class norms - I found myself asking him what he meant by the term *White*. Nalu instead provided a counter narrative to *White*, explaining that ‘locals’ take care of their families and friends, are easy going and friendly, and always place the interests of others before their own needs. From his response, one can infer that Nalu perceived ‘White’ culture as individualistic and selfish, the opposite of his perception of ‘local’ culture’.

This is another aspect of the *haole* experience in Hawai’i, where Whiteness and European cultural roots are associated with a legacy of cultural, political, social and economic hegemony. Reed (2001) explains, “Part of the negative feeling toward Caucasians results from their historic role as conquerors and oppressors of Native Hawaiians and later of the generations of workers who came to work their plantations” (p. 332). In contemporary Hawai’i there is a stigma attached to being *haole* and characteristics associated with this ethnic designation include loud, talkative, insensitive, ‘in-your-face’, ‘me-first’, miserly and wealthy (Reed, 2001).

Compare Nalu’s response with that of Alyssa’s, another student from the storied class. Alyssa is a mix of Filipino-American and Japanese-American who born and raised in Honolulu.

Alyssa followed the directions that I had listed under the prompt, silently constructing a response for the first five minutes of class before volunteering to share her response to the class. She stated, “Being local means acting more like the Japanese and doing things that value family and community”. I asked for specific examples, a common practice in this social studies class that was in part influenced by the complex area’s targeted focus on measuring the ability of students to cite and explain evidence. In response, Alyssa identified her participation in the traditional Japanese cultural practice of attending bon dances as well as partaking in the act of *omiyage*, the Japanese custom of providing gifts or souvenirs to friends, coworkers, and family after returning home from a trip. According to Alyssa, *omiyage* was more than the act of giving gifts; it is a Japanese social custom, if not an obligation. Whereas travelers in Europe and the United States are more likely to purchase souvenirs for themselves to remember their travels, Japanese culture emphasizes the value of relationships. Alyssa’s response emphasized her ethnic culture over that of ‘local’ culture, yet she did not distinguish between the two. The difference between Nalu and Alyssa’s perceptions can be attributed to their ethnicities and social class.

In Hawai‘i, Japanese-Americans occupy a top position in the social hierarchy whereas Native-Hawaiians are positioned near the bottom. As such, Nalu identified with his perception of ‘local’ culture, which he enmeshes with his Native-Hawaiian ethnicity. Kainoa, who self-identified as both Portuguese-American and Hawai‘i an-born, noted that being ‘local’ meant caring for and protecting the *aina*, the Hawaiian word for “land”. Interesting of note is the plight of residents of Portuguese descent in Hawai‘i. Although many Portuguese appear *haole* (embodying the physical characteristics consistent with European ancestry), they are allowed to be exempted from the *haole* category of identity because of their unique position in the plantation social structure under the White plantation bosses, reinforcing Reed’s (2001) notion

that identity in Hawai‘i is historically situated, continuously contested, and partially rule driven. Finally, we move to Captain, an African-American student who hails from a military family that had recently relocated to Hawai‘i from the continental United States. Captain also followed the directions of the prompt, adhering to the class norms. Although he did not choose to share his thoughts with the class, I overheard his response during the small group share-out activity. Captain perceived ‘locals’ as “lazy troublemakers” who exerted limited effort at school. In Captain’s opinion, which was formed through his experience at Onshore High School, his ‘local’ peers tended to lack the desire or motivation to excel academically.

Okamura (2008) argues that ethnicity is the “primary structural principle of social relations” in Hawai‘i, as well as the axis around which inequality is diffused throughout society. The responses to the prompt that I have described demonstrate how one’s ethnicity – Native Hawaiian, Filipino-American, Japanese-American, Portuguese-American, and African-American – frame their relationship with ‘local’ culture and identity. Okamura also points out that ethnic groups in Hawai‘i have all experienced “...substantial transformations in the significance, meaning, and expression of their respective ethnic identities” (p. 91). This brings to light the significant impact of social class on the interpretation of ‘local’, shedding additional light on the invisible forces that factored into the conflict storied in this vignette. Socioeconomic privilege in Hawai‘i falls along ethnic lines. The average family income is clearly led by Whites and East Asian American groups such as Chinese Americans and Japanese Americans, while Native Hawaiians, Samoans, and Filipinos fall at the bottom of the list. The latter three groups also maintain the lowest levels of educational attainment of any ethnic group in Hawai‘i (Okamura, 2008). The current social hierarchy of Hawai‘i is rooted in history, culture, and politics that can be traced to the plantation era and evolved from the economic and political status of the nations

from which immigrants to Hawai‘i came. That is, some countries wielded more power with respect to the status of their workers than others. For example, established countries, such as Japan, were able to negotiate agreements with U.S. corporations in Hawai‘i that led to better working conditions and pay for immigrants. On the contrary, The Philippines – which was still a territory of the United States and “had less political and social capital than Japan” was not able to advocate for Filipino immigrants, leading to their distinction as receiving the lowest pay and poorest living conditions (Banks, 2012). Such privilege (Japanese immigrants) and oppression (Filipino immigrants) has created lasting effects on each group’s access to resources and socioeconomic mobility. This, in turn, has colored each group’s perception of what it means to be ‘local’.

The first three students described above all self-identified as being ‘local’. In addition, all readily accepted one another as such despite the ethnic inequality that exists between them. Wilson (2009) sheds light on this phenomenon, noting that ‘local’ culture provides a “unifying identity for the people in Hawaii” (p. 95). This identity transcends class, ethnicity, and race, yet it can also simultaneously be a spotlight for these same differences, as revealed by the (culturally) relativistic understandings of ‘local’. This homogenous discourse ignores ethnic inequality and might have attributed to the hesitation of the other ‘local’ students, who collectively represented the majority of the class, to step in and calm the belligerent students down. Wilson (2009) sums up this sentiment, highlighting that, “Instead of looking inward, many ‘Locals’ only show resistance to one group, ‘non-Locals’” (p. 98).

Creative Writing Measure: “Reconsidering the Maverick Conversation”

After school each day, I drive to back to town and check the surf up at the Diamond Head lookout. Watching the waves break across the reef each afternoon calms my nerves and eases my burdens. Oddly, this is one of the few places where I do not feel like a maverick. Familiar faces

abound. Strangers smile at one another, throwing shakas. Although I was born thousands of miles away, I am *of* this. My connection to this place transcends a physical presence and conscious preference. It is spiritual.

In his 2008 novel “West of Jesus: Surfing, Science, and the Origins of Belief”, Steven Kotler describes the spiritual aspect of surfing; the intangibles which connect us to the waves we ride. He explains:

Waves are weather. Temperatures produce wind, which produces waves, which interact with a near infinite number of variables to produce something that I find constantly recognizable despite being absolutely temporary and completely variable. And because surfing takes place at such high speeds on such a wildly variable surface, the sport requires an incredible amount of muscle memory. Muscle memory is created when a movement is repeated so many times that it forms a pattern that then becomes a permanent feature of our brain’s subconscious database. (pp. 76-77)

It helps to reexamine this connection through a Cartesian lens of dualism. Life, through this lens, is a struggle between our desire for separation and our desire for union. But to ride a wave, you have to completely forget yourself – both mind and body. You must be fully absorbed in the moment or risk falling off the wave. Every wave represents a union, providing you with an opportunity to momentarily connect with something far beyond yourself. Much of the surfing experience, Kotler involves a subconscious pattern interacting with an ineffable pattern. The

subconscious, as I see it, involves the muscle memory and knowledge attained from experience. The ineffable is the unknown – each wave is different, yet familiar.

It is ironic that my principal cautioned me to avoid being a ‘maverick’ because this proved unavoidable. Since I had last taught at this school, I had integrated new knowledge about what constituted ‘good’ teaching and learning through my experiences in private school settings, learning from my doctoral studies, etc. If ‘maverick’ refers to one with an outsider positionality, the term ‘mercenary’ proves more fitting in light of my role. A mercenary is a ‘gun for hire’, one who serves the needs of others for economic gain. I was fighting a battle of sorts for a cause that was not my own. Unlike the spiritual connection in surfing, where participation feels organic despite the locale, teaching in the Hawai‘i’s public education system felt *wrong*. Until this point in my career, I had always put what I believed were the needs of my students first. This time around, I was no longer an early career, insecure new teacher with doubt as to my abilities. The struggles of my students manifested in a multitude of ways, all of which suggested a different approach to teaching and learning – one more in line with the holistic, student-centered philosophy of education I had cultivated yet was forced to ignore due to policy demands.

Critical Analysis: Layer 2

The associations between class, ethnicity, and educational achievement in Hawai‘i have led to the formation of many well-known stereotypes. Wilson (2009) explains:

Many times, these stereotypes involve two or more of these variables. Many social groups, places, foods, slogans, and behaviors are “typed” in ways that reveal just how naturalized phrases such as “the Filipino yardman,” “the rich Haole,” or “the lazy, poor Hawaiians,” have become in Honolulu. Nowhere is this problematic association between class, ethnicity, and disposition

clearer than in instances where these variables are treated as
virtually synonymous. (p. 102)

These stereotypes undoubtedly impacted the dynamics of my classroom in the time period leading up to this critical incident. Take for example my own ‘icebreaking’ conversation with Nalu, which occurred during my first day of teaching at Onshore High School in January. After being introduced to one another by the Student Activities Coordinator outside of my new classroom, Nalu indicated that he wanted to know where I had taught in the past. I obliged, hoping that my openness would support the cultivation of a strong relationship between Nalu and I.

I described each of the educational settings where I had worked as an educator in chronological order, pausing when I reached my previous tenure at Onshore High School in order to describe the positive relationship that I had developed with Nalu’s older brother, Mana. Nalu acknowledged this relationship, mentioning that his brother held me in high regard, “Because you listened to his class and put them first”. Based upon this comment, I had inferred that Nalu was well aware of the plethora of extra time that I had dedicated to coordinating guest speakers and scheduling off-campus activities based upon the suggestions of Mana and his peers. Reflecting back now, I believe that Nalu valued not only my ability and willingness to listen to students, but also my disposition to act upon this feedback as well.

When I mentioned that I currently held a summer school position teaching public school students at the elite Barrel School, Nalu interrupted me and announced to those around us (jokingly and with a large grin), “Ho, you must like teaching those rich haole kids huh? They must be easy!” At that moment, I did not give the comment much thought. In my experience, this was not an uncommon sentiment amongst the residents of Hawai‘i. In fact, I had heard similar

comments for years. This was a way that various individuals – my students, friends, other surfers whom I met in the ocean, and classmates at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa - playfully joked around with me. In almost all cases, I had developed quality rapport with these actors through my open acknowledgement that Barrel School was in fact a unique context and much different from the public schools where I had taught. Critical reflection highlights the significance of this interaction, which stems from the casual nature of the experience.

Nalu’s association between wealth, ethnicity, and place demonstrates just how deeply embedded inequality in Hawai‘i is. Nalu, and the other actors referenced from various contexts in the past, ‘typed’ my work experience at Barrel School as both a sign of Whiteness and upper-class wealth – two social identities that fall into the ‘non-local’ social grouping. This reveals a social divide between the actors from all of the contexts where this stereotype has been mentioned and myself. In the case of some contexts, my ‘localness’ was actually accepted due to other factors. For example, many of those whom I have met surfing accept my ‘localness’ due to the above-average surfing abilities that I possess in addition to my knowledge of and adherence to the norms and etiquette that are embedded within the surfing culture in Hawai‘i. My surfer-self, I had assumed, served as enough of a ‘local’ identity marker to effectively unfasten the haole identity that is automatically applied to me due to Hawai‘i’s racialized identity politics.

On the other hand, it appears that Nalu, Larissa, Ann Marie, and the other ‘local’ students storied in this critical incident adopted a position that clearly denied my ‘localness’. This might have been due to factors in addition to their knowledge of my private-school work experience, such as my adherence to school-mandated student conduct policies as well as my all-too-often confrontational responses to everyday issues of non-compliance in the classroom. Over the duration of the Semester, Larissa and I had gotten into a number of arguments in front of the

class. These incidents typically stemmed from what I perceived to be deliberate acts of non-compliance that had occurred on an almost daily basis (e.g. moving her desk across the room from the circle I made each morning, listening to music during lessons, ordering/walking out of class to pick up food). Attempts at redirection often ended with Larissa cursing at me in front of the class. At the time, I believed that I was frustrated with Larissa due to her actions and responses to my attempts at redirection. However, a look back at my life only a few months prior to returning to the DOE sheds additional light on the seeds of this conflict. My tenure at Offshore Academy, a private school with a yearly tuition that exceeded \$20,000 dollars was characterized by a focus on promoting “deeper learning”. This involved a targeted emphasis on building and implementing a fully project-based learning curriculum grounded in authenticity and relevance.

The socioeconomic status of my primarily East Asian American student population mirrored this group’s position atop the social hierarchy of Hawai‘i. Non-compliance on the level of what I was experiencing at this public high school did not exist. The most common offense involved students who chose to play games on their school-provided iPads during class time. When redirected, these students almost always apologized and subsequently immediately tuned back into the learning for that particular day. Most project work was conducted by students independently or in small groups outside of the classroom, a practice that was encouraged by school administrators. These students generally accountable, polite, and passionate about learning. Small class sizes enabled me to work individually with students, with whom I built meaningful relationships. I even observed that those students who were not engaged in class activities still understood how to act *appropriately*; that is, in a manner that did not negatively impact the learning of others in the class.

From a cultural capital perspective (Bourdieu, 1986), the term “appropriately” proves to be value-laden word. The pedagogical requirements dedicated by the new educational context that I had entered stood in stark contrast to the holistic philosophy of education that I had cultivated as a private school teacher. It becomes apparent that my experiences in the latter context had embedded within me deeply set assumptions about the nature, purpose, and scope of education, as well a vision of what ‘good’ teaching and learning consisted of. These assumptions were engrained within me, taking the form of invisible norms which were largely unquestioned and furthermore, against which all other experiences were compared. As a result, I had unknowingly generated a deficit view of many of my new students. My teacher self, as I understood this identity, was that of a student-centered, holistic educator.

Gee (1997) describes the American dominant, middle class cultural model of success as characterized by individual effort, hard work, and pursuit of advancement at the expense of personal relationships. Drawing from Asian and Pacific cultures, ‘local’ culture, on the contrary, tends to stress harmony, group membership, conflict avoidance, centrality of the family and a preference for the middle way (Reed, 2001). As evidenced in this analysis, ethnicity and class color the interpretation of what it means to be ‘local’. The student body at Offshore Academy was largely comprised of the East Asian American ethnicities that sit atop Hawai‘i’s social hierarchy. While many elements of ‘local’ culture pervaded various aspects of the school, institutionalized western values served as the engine that drove the academic program. Much like an orange, Offshore Academy presented a firm outer peel to the larger community which emphasized social responsibility, empathy, collaboration, and moral and ethical decision making – all of which correspond to ‘local’ values. Under the peel, and generally hidden from the sight

of the larger community, existed a competitive school culture which stressed the significance of high achievement and premier college acceptance for all students.

This insight serves to highlight the repercussions resulting from the unexamined associations that exist between wealth and ethnicity. Through lenses of ethnicity and class, different ‘kinds’ of ‘locals’ exist in Hawai‘i. The implications of such distinctions become apparent when investigating how the pedagogical practices that had passed as ‘local’ at Offshore Academy did not translate to this specific public school setting. Although these assumptions were cultivated over time and through various lived-experiences, the quarterly, all-school meetings led by the private school president assist in understanding my ignorance. Offshore Academy’s new president, Dr. Smith, had only recently relocated to Hawai‘i from California when he began this tradition. Having inherited an institution that had a rich history yet lacked a true identity, Dr. Smith immediately set out to reinvent the school as an innovative hub where ‘thought leaders’ up to the task of creating solutions to the critical issues facing an increasingly connected world due to the advent of globalization were cultivated through a ‘deeper learning’ focus that heavily emphasized project-based learning activities that culminated in presentations of learning to authentic audiences.

Increasingly, these quarterly meetings took a competitive tone as Dr. Smith compared factors such as our endowment, physical infrastructure, and college acceptance rate with that of our competitors. The values of collaboration, communication, and creativity were emphasized. According to Dr. Smith, through our progressive philosophy we were actively repositioning ourselves as a premier institution in the nation, not just the state. This approach resonated with me due to its classroom implications. I was provided full autonomy to design my courses around solving real-world issues, and as such felt – and still do - that we were collectively building

something meaningful. The student body became adept at tackling the ‘messy’ nature of project-based learning, which entailed working collaboratively in a rigorous academic setting.

Complaints were rare, as more often than not students could be counted on to do more than their fair share of work in order to keep their group on track to meet deadlines. Block-scheduling and small class sizes ensured that I had time to work closely with all students, which simultaneously led to the construction of meaningful relationships between students and myself. At the time, I considered our program to be conduit of ‘local’ values.

During my first month of teaching at Onshore High School, I had attempted to maintain this holistic focus, developing a curriculum for both sections of the Modern Hawaiian History course in a manner that reflected the diversity present within each class. Students were provided with opportunities to discuss biases and stereotypes, to work with individuals of different backgrounds, and to explore how they themselves were influenced by culture. Although I was *aware* that different students were going to behave, receive information, and respond differently based upon the values and practices of their cultures, I understand that was not prepared to accept such differences due to the unquestioned assumptions about teaching and learning that guided my ideology and actions. These assumptions also served to reinforce the various forms of embedded cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) that I unconsciously expected of my public school students each day. Embedded cultural capital can be defined as the legitimate cultural attitudes, preferences, and behaviors that are internalized during the socialization process (Lamont & Lareau, 1988). The constructs of collaboration and communication come to mind as examples of such. My new students, who largely possessed limited experience both working in groups for long periods of time and navigating project-based learning activities due to their public school

backgrounds, often voiced concern about the lack of effort or accountability from other group members.

Instead of taking into account the cultural and/or educational history of all students involved, I had immediately assumed that any lack of effort was by choice, and further, that such behavior constituted non-compliance. After all, I had observed as a number of my ‘local’ students either refused to sit with their group or spent the duration of the class period off-task using their phones. Compounding issues further, a number of other faculty members had made it a point to inform me that the classes I had inherited would surely benefit from a ‘tough love’ approach due to the absence of structure that characterized the entire first semester. After their initial teacher had resigned only weeks into the school year, a revolving door of substitute teachers, whom were not provided with lesson plans on many occasions, met these students each day. In response to these intrapersonal and interpersonal demands, I had adopted a classroom management technique which reflected Gee’s (1997) description of the dominant middle-class values that pervade American culture. I made statements such as, “Don’t worry about him, just focus on doing your section of the framework”, “If you give your best effort, you can still receive an excellent grade even though a teammate might fail”, and, “Ignore her”. As a means of justifying the type of communication and collaboration that I had desired, I even referred to the attributes ‘required’ for success in the *real world* that students would experience after high school.

This also demonstrates how students who fit well into the norms – the expectations and routines of schooling – are praised and acknowledged. Students from different ethnic or sociocultural backgrounds often possess little or none of the cultural capital of the dominant group thus were discouraged and devalued (Romano, 2014). Many, if not all, of the non-

compliant students, were ‘local’ products of the public school system. Working with emotionally volatile students proved to be the hardest part of teaching at Onshore High School. Not knowing if and when these students were going to melt down or lash out made me feel as if I was walking on eggshells while teaching. This, in turn, led to feelings of frustration when students did not meet the high expectations I had set for them. At first, I had attempted to use induction rather than coercive discipline, characterized by spending time explaining the rationale for specific rules and pointing out the consequences of breaking rules. However, the extra-large class sizes and shorter, fifty-five minute period lengths took their toll on my ability to prioritize classroom management techniques aimed at building community. Within a few weeks, many groups had fallen behind. Simultaneously, my induction-based approach devolved into coercive measures aimed at keeping students on task. These included using threats, imposing my ‘superior’ power as a teacher, and taking advantage of an ability to control resources such as grades. Noddings (1992) points out that coercion interferes with caring relationships.

It is also important to note that the institutional demands of the Hawai‘i Department of Education proved to be in direct contrast to the ‘local’ culture within which Onshore High School was firmly situated. On one hand, I desired to share with all of my students the engaging, relevant, and authentic model of learning that I believed that they ‘deserved’. On the other hand, I felt pressured to prepare these students for the strict academic requirements dictated by the DOE. This was not purely an internal pressure, as was the choice to develop a curriculum that reflected my own ideologies. This pressure was institutional in nature: I *had* to prepare these students because my own teaching evaluation depended upon their performance. To clarify, a significant element of the Hawai‘i’s comprehensive evaluation system – formally known as the Educator Effectiveness System (EES) – was the successful completion of one’s Student Learning

Outcomes (SLOs). The SLOs took the form of predictions that educators made regarding the intellectual growth of all students based upon specified criteria. In theory, the SLOs serve to promote sound pedagogical practices that include utilizing formative instruction, setting high achievement goals for all students, and addressing the individual needs of said students (Yoshida & Hayashida, 2013). My new principal met with me to discuss the process, explaining that the SLOs for all Social Studies teachers in our district were aligned to a mandated complex-area focus on developing research writing skills.

In other words, students were tasked with constructing an argument that is supported by multiple pieces of evidence. She then described how teachers first established a baseline for these skills from which to make their predictions and are subsequently evaluated on the accuracy (+80%) of these predictions. In reality, I was frustrated because I did not have a baseline to work with because the previous teacher did not adhere to the established protocol. None-the-less, I was told that I would be held accountable and subsequently used my best judgment to make educated guesses pertaining to the ability levels of my new students. I was determined to attain a quality rating for both career stability as well as to prove to myself that I was in fact a ‘good’ teacher.

This brings us back to the danger of the stereotypes resulting from the associations between class, ethnicity, and educational achievement in Hawai‘i. Chinn (2006) notes, “Middle class teachers who hold this view of success may view students from non-mainstream social groups that place high value on social relationships as unmotivated, defiant, resistant, even inherently deficient” (p. 370). Although I had taught successfully in this context only three years ago, I was incognizant of the ramifications that resulted from the actions associated with my hidden perceptions about teaching and learning in this public school context. I had surmised that I carried many of the same identity markers from my last experience at this school; I was the

laid-back, friendly, funny, food-sharing surfer who had received more letters of appreciation from students during the annual teacher appreciation week than anyone other educator. The only significant shift in identity from then to now, I assumed, involved becoming a 'better' educator. The process of conducting autoethnography – storying this critical incident and then analyzing it through a critical lens - opened the door to new understandings through reflexive thought. Early in the analysis process, I became aware that I required behaviors contrary to home cultural values and practices of my non-mainstream students. My recent teaching experience in two private school settings led to the cultivation of invisible norms against which I compared the abilities behaviors of my new students.

The 'local' students from this vignette were expected to embody the cultural capital that I saw as essential to success or risk becoming marginalized. As I learned after the incident, Nalu's anger towards me steadily grew throughout the semester because he felt compelled, according to the school principal, to "protect his friends". On the other hand, I had genuinely believed that I was 'helping' the 'troublemakers', when instead I had overlooked the value of social relationships within this group. My reaction to the various internal and external demands/pressures manifested in behaviors and mannerisms that were perceived by many of my 'local' students as 'non-local'. From a reflexive perspective, Nalu and the rest of his friends would most likely describe my teacher-self as a bossy, confrontational know-it-all who lacked patience and aloha. Through their collective lens, my actions did not emphasize the importance of 'local' values such as community, harmony, and easy-goingness. I had incorrectly assumed that I was perceived as 'local' by all of my students based upon other actions that I believed demonstrated these values. I accepted late work, laughed at myself, shared food, and fostered an open dialogue with students who disobeyed school policies. However, my perception of my

teacher-self versus that of the ‘local’ students storied in this vignette demonstrate that we were clearly out of sync. Talbert-Johnson (2006) sums it up well, asserting “The reality is that when teachers and students are out of sync, the inevitable occurs: miscommunication and confrontation between the student, the teacher, and the home; hostility; alienation; diminished self-esteem; and eventually school failure” (p. 153).

Okamura (2008) adds that social and ethnic inequality in Hawai‘i is so naturalized that it is often reduced to ethnic humor in addition to the naturalized stereotypes discussed above. An experience from the Modern Hawaiian History class storied in this vignette stands out as a prime example of how these stereotypes can have real bearings on teaching and learning if left unexamined. Roughly halfway through the Semester at Onshore High School, Jayden was sitting in my classroom eating lunch with friends. I approached the group and asked aloud, to no one in particular, “How are you doing today?” This led to a conversation about the girls’ basketball team, of which these students were members. As the conversation flowed into the following class period, I could not help but think about how enjoyable it was to connect with these girls on their level. Ann Marie interrupted my internal thoughts, abruptly asking, “Why are you *here*”? Her tone was completely genuine and caught me off guard. Initially, I took her sentiment as a compliment. After all, these students were suggesting that I was too qualified to be in a public school classroom with them.

Critical reflection reverses this egotistical myth which I had perpetuated through a lack of reflexivity pertaining to my own positionality in this context. Such a critical consciousness begins with my recollection of a narrative that I had eagerly shared with my students earlier in the semester regarding my pursuit of a doctoral degree. As I proudly described my doctoral journey and research interests to the class, I highlighted that it defied what was expected of me as

a result what I described as a “working class” upbringing in New Jersey, ignoring the impact that my middle-class background and positionality as a White male had on my access to the cultural, social, and economic capital that prove essential to educational attainment. My formal education for grades K-12 took place solely within public schools situated in a lower-middle class suburban New Jersey township. The lower social status associated with my hometown, as compared to the affluent communities that surrounded us, cultivated within me a belief that I had *overcome* a certain stigma and was in fact *beating the odds* through my pursuit of a doctorate. How *brave* of me! I even conceded to possessing the aforementioned forms of capital to an extent which had enabled me to attend and complete college with a graduate degree. However, a Ph.D. was an institutional credential that I honestly believed was not intended for me. I described how the private college that I had graduated from was known for a generous admission policy. In addition, none of my direct family members or relatives had ever entertained the thought of such an advanced degree and as such I had no concept of what it entailed. At the time, I believed this narrative to be true. In that moment, I believe that I envisioned my doctoral student-self as a broke, full-time public servant who was committed to improving the educational experiences of his students. Even after critical reflection, I still hold many aspects of this description to be true. However, an increased awareness of my positionality, and the privilege associated with it, leads to further insight about the critical incident storied here.

I gathered that I was sharing my passion with students. The sentiment was not reciprocal, most notably amongst a number of my ‘local’ students. Reed (2001) sheds light on the matter:

Non-locals, particularly *haoles* but also Asian Americans from the US mainland, discover that the cultural characteristics that helped them to be successful in other settings are seen as maladaptive in

the island culture, where a different set of norms and expectations predominate. Calling attention to oneself, focusing on personal advancement, and developing a strong sense of individual identity are all maladaptive in local culture. (p. 331)

Excessive talking about oneself does not align to the values that frame ‘local’ culture. This, I was made aware of long before this experience had occurred. However, my teacher-self presumed that I was exposing the group to future potentialities that they might have not have conceived as plausible before.

Reexamining this experience through a critical lens provides space for both the acknowledgment of my privilege, as it pertains to the concepts of social and cultural capital, as well as an opportunity to more clearly understand the consequences of my actions on the educational experience of my ‘local’ students. Mutually, the social and cultural forms of capital possessed by an individual provide him or her with an opportunity to discover whether structural barriers exist. Putnam (1995) defines social capital as “social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them” (p. 19). Put simply, social capital resides in relationships. I have since become deeply aware of the extent to which I have benefitted from the supportive relationships characteristic of social capital. The examples listed below demonstrate how in addition to one’s parents, school personnel (teachers, counselors, coaches, administrators), and community members also play important roles in the process of developing educational aspirations. When I struggled with mathematics in high school, I was sent to a private tutor by my parents. They also registered me for the SAT on three separate occasions, once following me to the testing site to ensure that I had arrived. My parents, relatives, and teachers served as protective agents who provided for my basic needs while promoting a

Eurocentric worldview that cultivated in me a belief that I could achieve unlimited success through hard work. A local county official served as institutional agent who provided me with a letter of recommendation for college admission despite the absence of a relationship of any sort with me; a privilege that resulted from my father's business relationship with the county.

Although my academic performance in high school was less than desirable at times, I possessed the embedded and objectified cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1977, 1986) necessary to succeed in a public school system framed by the same Eurocentric values that were embedded within the cultural fields of my upbringing. In short, I understood how to act 'appropriately' within the institutionalized context of school due to an upbringing by a mother who was afforded the opportunity to quit her job in order to raise her two sons the way that she saw fit through active transmission. This included taking us to church, volunteering as a 'class mom', visiting the local library weekly, and ensuring that we were able to play the organized sports that we were passionate about. I also possessed much in the way of authentic objectified capital, which is reliant on the embedded form of capital in order to 'properly' value it. Examples include being provided with my own computer for school work as well as my own room in our house within which I could complete homework and study without distractions. What my parents could not actively transmit was still passively attained through practices of the dominant culture within which I lived. Hampton-Garland (2009) points out that all cultures passively transmit knowledge that is relevant within their culture; "however", she explains, "when it is not dominant cultural capital, it is recognized as 'inappropriate' and thus requires modification or complete change" (p. 54).

I responded to Ann Marie's question by waxing poetic about the value of public education as well as society's responsibility to create equitable opportunities for all students. The

analysis preceding this paragraph demonstrates the extent to which my response was framed by a deficit view of the specific ‘local’ culture that these students embodied as the result of both their ethnicity and social class. Instead of leveling the educational playing field, my unexamined perceptions and subsequent actions served to increase the social stratification between myself and the ‘local’ students. Through Larissa’s lens, I was just another ‘dumb haole’; a cultural ‘outsider’ who was bent upon forcing my own, *superior* cultural agenda upon her. Shared amongst all members of the specific group of ‘local’ students storied here was a sense of frustration from the almost daily conflicts that occurred over the duration of the semester. I had largely dismissed the ‘local’ cultural knowledge that these students had both actively been taught and passively attained over the course of their lives in Hawai‘i because it seemingly clashed with the dominant, western cultural knowledge that serves as the symbolic framework on which public schools are built.

Sadly, most of these ‘local’ students have had previous experience navigating what Stanley (2007) refers to as the “master narrative”; the script that specifies and controls how some social processes are carried out. Master narratives embody and dictate expectations about how things work and how stories are framed. As far as “institutions such as schools and businesses tend to reward practices and ways of thinking that are aligned to middle-upper class culture,” (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 496), I can presume that these students were frustrated by the manner to which the dominant White, middle-class dispositions and values that promote academic success contrasted those of their respective cultures. Adopting a reflexive perspective, I can better understand why these students resisted my influence. Resistance served to address the alienation these students felt in schooling situations where they perceived that they had no control and little choice. As a result of the working class socialization resulting from the visible and invisible

forces mentioned here, some ‘local’ students, usually of the ethnicities that comprise the bottom of Hawai‘i’s social hierarchy, adopt a more severe positionality of ‘local’ identity that serves as a counter narrative to the Western, middle-class culture that they believe that they are not in a position to succeed in.

An understanding that my ‘local’ students largely did not possess what I possessed in terms of social and cultural capital brings to light the construct of ‘super local’, a term that I had heard referenced often by my ‘local’ friends and colleagues throughout my tenure in the islands. ‘Super local’ was most frequently used to describe any person, action, mentality, and/or pattern of speech perceived to be at the extreme ‘local’ end of the ‘local’/‘non-local’ spectrum. Eli Wilson (2009) touches upon this concept in his examination of the influence of ‘local’ identity within the Honolulu city government, explaining:

Although not always used this way, “super-Local” also provides middle-class “Locals” with a specific way to refer to undesirable or unsightly dimensions of “Local” culture. Viewed in this way, that which comprises “super-Local” is often stigmatized as the veritable “black sheep” of the righteous “Local” flock. It is the extreme (and thus negative) form of many heralded “Local” traits.

(p. 111)

Although being labeled as ‘super local’ affirms an individual’s ‘local’ identity, it also implies that person’s “uncultured” and perhaps undesirable traits. In other words, the phrase ‘super local’ means that one is *too* local to reap the benefits that come from asserting a ‘local’ identity. My experience in this specific context reveals that students from marginalized ethnic populations – Native Hawaiians, Filipino-Americans and Samoans – are more likely adopt this

cultural position than students who possess significantly more capital. Wilson (2009) sums it up concisely, noting “Unable to actively profit from being ‘Local’ yet still at odds with ‘non-Local’ forms of identity and capital, super-Locals are left with little social advantage and even less access to cultural and social capital” (p. 112).

I have become aware that a number of the characters portrayed in this vignette represent this sub-category of ‘local’ through their collective heightened emphasis on the singular value of respect. I can recall multiple instances of this particular value system in action, yet one episode that occurred during my first week back at Onshore High School demonstrates the ‘super local’ mentality efficiently. In addition to Modern Hawaiian History, I also coordinated the Peer Education Program, a preventive health education program promoting healthy lifestyle behaviors through positive self-esteem and responsible decision-making. As students of all grade-levels filtered into the classroom one morning, I observed that a number of them, whom I would later identify as ‘local’, chose to sit strategically away from where I was standing in front of the classroom, leaving multiple open desks between us. These students appeared to be standoffish; some smirked, others talked over me, and a select few outright ignored my presence altogether. About halfway through the learning activity, I prompted the small groups to stop for a moment so that I could provide feedback. Ohu - a male student of Samoan/Native Hawaiian ethnicity – immediately shouted at me, “You know Mister, you have to show us respect first in order to get respect back”. I asked Ohu to explain what he meant; what I really wanted to know was *why* he felt the need to assert this sentiment to me at this particular moment. I reflected-in-action, quickly trying to determine if anything that I did might have been misconstrued as rude or disrespectful. Ohu responded in an aggressive manner, “My dad told me that my teachers need to show me respect. If they don’t, I don’t have to listen to the teacher”. My immediate reaction was

internal. I did not agree with this ‘backwards’ sentiment. *What kind of father would teach his child something that served to prevent his or her academic success?*

In the cultural fields of my upbringing in New Jersey, demonstrating respect to all adults - *especially* teachers - was a deeply embedded social norm. Common sense, or perhaps much cultural reinforcement, suggested that teachers were positioned in the role of ‘gatekeepers’, possessing the skills and knowledge that I *needed* to succeed. Those who did not achieve academic success were perceived as lacking the specific skills, abilities, attitudes, and/or dispositions that were required for such success. This narrative was reinforced in an array of contexts including school, church, specific television programs, as well as family members. The question arises: How can two contexts foster such seemingly contrasting ideologies? Glancing away from New Jersey and back toward the ‘super locals’ of Hawai‘i yields various answers. A central tenant of ‘super local’ culture involves gaining, earning, and maintaining the respect of your peers. Gaining respect, I had observed, surpassed even that of achieving academic success for many of my ‘local’ students. Seemingly stuck in a context (schooling) with the perceived scarce opportunity for success, the accumulation of gaining respect, that is, social honors, garners newfound importance (Wilson, 2009).

I have come to learn that the implications of this local identity marker on the dynamics of teaching and learning are significant. The critical analysis process served to deepen my understanding of why and how ‘super locals’ performed their identities, as well as the consequences to them and others because of their attachment to those identities. Wilson (2009) describes how the ‘super local’ mentality serves to perpetuate the status-quo in Hawai‘i:

And insofar as ‘gaining respect’ displaces other aspirations such as economic advancement or position attainment, it works insidiously

to de-emphasize upward economic mobility... the unique arrangement of values that super-Locals profess stunts the abilities of those socialized into this subculture (especially offspring) into working-class mentalities as well” (p. 117).

Wilson provides further insight into the nature of adopting this identity marker, adding, “The working-class socialization of super-Locals occurs in part through what it de-values in the process: middle-class aspirations that prioritize professionalism and self-advancement” (p. 117). Unfortunately, the ‘super-local’ mentality of actively resisting Western, middle-class culture serves to further marginalize the population by inscribing additional barriers to the economic advancement and upward mobility of those who adopt the position. Assertions of masculinity are correlated with the ‘super local’ value of gaining respect. The ‘super local’ identity marker manifested as both appearances and attitudes at Onshore High School. Appearance is meant to include more elements than clothing style, to include posture and body language as well. Students who adopted this identity generally walked slowly around campus with their chests puffed out. This carried over into attitudes, which included actions such as refusing to move out of the way for other students or faculty members when navigating the school campus and classroom acts of non-compliance. Any success that I had in bridging the barriers that existed between ‘super locals’ and myself at this school involved promoting secure attachment.

Some scholars, such as Ty Tengan (2002), have argued that colonized men of the Pacific often adopt precolonial, hyper masculine identities “to resist the perceived feminization and emasculation that accompanied colonization in Hawaii” (p. 251). Labrador (2004) notes:

Depending on the sociohistorical context and actors involved,
Local can index racialized bodies (‘look Local’), cultural identities

(‘act Local’), linguistic affiliations (‘talk Local’), and political positionings. In this way, the boundaries of Local are constantly changing and continuously policed through processes of self-definition and othering. (p. 297)

Brah notes that cultural differences are constituted within the interstices of sociopolitical and economic relations (Brah, 1996). This is another aspect of the *haole* experience in Hawai’i, where Whiteness and European cultural roots are associated with a legacy of cultural, political, social and economic hegemony. Reed (2001) explains, “Part of the negative feeling toward Caucasians results from their historic role as conquerors and oppressors of Native Hawaiians and later of the generations of workers who came to work their plantations” (p. 332). In contemporary Hawai’i there is a stigma attached to being *haole* and characteristics associated with this ethnic designation include loud, talkative, insensitive, ‘in-your-face’, ‘me-first’, miserly and wealthy (Reed, 2001).

In this sense, I had attempted to unfasten my *haole* identity while carefully refastening my ‘local’ identity through adopting the ‘local’ cultural identity marker of being a surfer. Although my ‘local’ students were well aware that I was an avid surfer, this singular ‘local’ identity marker was seemingly not enough for the majority of them to view me as a cultural insider. Walker (2011) explains the cultural significance of surfing in Hawai’i, asserting “On land, many Hawaiians were marginalized from political, social, and economic spheres during much of the twentieth century. Yet in the ocean Native surfers secured a position atop a social hierarchy” (p. 2). The ocean surf zone is described as “...a kind of borderland, a place where both power dynamics and colonialism functioned differently than hegemonic authorities expected them to on land” (p. 168). My surfing self acknowledges this hierarchy, as I follow

adamantly adhere the norms and customs of the surf zone – a context where I am positioned squarely at the bottom of the hierarchy. In the Hawai‘i an surf zone, ‘local’ culture reigns true: elders (“Uncles”) are respected and given first priority pertaining to wave selection, community and harmony are emphasized through taking no more than is needed (although context dependent, most everyone receives an opportunity to catch a wave), and the spirit of aloha rings true through the “stoke” (positive feelings) that we feel for others.

Since my ethnicity, as Reed (2001) puts it, “precludes a claim to authentic local lineage” (p. 332), it was my hope that the ‘local’ students would draw upon the wider fabric of ‘local’ identity – in this case my identity as a surfer - in order to claim me as a ‘local’. Instead, their observations of my mannerisms, in addition to their knowledge of my educational aspirations, taken in the form of my pursuit of an advanced institutional degree and work history, left too much of a deficit for a single element of ‘local’ culture to make up for. As gatekeepers of ‘local’ identity in this specific context, my *haoleness* remained fastened. Similarly, it becomes clear that the personal beliefs, values, assumptions, perceptions, and interpretations that I learned from surfing within the context of Hawai‘i did not translate into this institutional setting. Although surfing promotes the ‘laid back’ element that is integral to ‘local’ culture, both internal (my cultural upbringing) and institutional (school and system policies that reflect middle-upper class values) pressures manifested in the form of a sheer lack of this characteristic. From this experience, I have come to understand that *haole* identity can be unfastened, but it is a complicated process influenced by a variety of factors.

Inspired by Halagao’s (2006) insight into her unique positionality stemming from lived experiences as a Filipina American raised in continental United States, which provided her with an ‘insider’ status pertaining to oppression, “yet an outsider to the local scene” (p. 38), I reflect

on my own experience. Growing up White and middle-class in the continental United States provides me with an ‘outsider’ status pertaining to expediting oppression, as opposed to the oppression faced by Halagao. Moving to Hawai‘i as a haole ‘transplant’ also positions me as an ‘outsider’ to the local scene. There are many other ‘double negatives’ living and teaching in the islands today.

Vignette #2: “Where’s the ‘Old’ Nick?”

“Good morning, Betty”, I say to Doug’s secretary as I walk into her office, making sure to demonstrate the sense of enthusiasm in my voice that I presume she expects from me. Inside, I am feeling simultaneously unsure, anxious, and upset. Sadly, I am not completely uncomfortable with these troubling feelings. They have been present, in some form or another, for the duration of this semester and are beginning to eat away at me. *I have tried everything to remedy these feelings*, I tell myself, almost reassuringly. Enhancing my personal-life as means to readjust a personal to work-life balance that had gradually tipped almost completely in favor of the ‘work’ end of the spectrum was supposed to alleviate all of my issues.

I was confused. *Increasing, the amount of time dedicated to activities that I am most passionate about outside of school did make me feel better*. This additional time was allocated between spending time with friends, going surfing, and practicing yoga. Although I enjoyed these activities very much, the rich and rewarding personal life that I had cultivated was not the solution to my ills. Almost immediately after partaking in these enjoyable activities, the negative feelings deep inside me would rear their ugly heads, as if calling for attention. *There is more work to be done*, they beckoned day and night. As of late, a feeling of hopelessness had overtaken all others. *How am I expected to sleep at night with so many responsibilities placed squarely upon me? Is this dreary state of being my new ‘normal’?*

Betty responds back, “Hi Nick. Doug and Jessica will see you now”. I must have stared too long. “Go ahead”, Betty prompts me, disregarding my ‘deer in the headlights’ gaze. She points towards Doug’s office, indicating that I should enter. *The principal and my department head are waiting for me*. The energy in Betty’s office is one of cautiousness. I can hear it in her voice and see it in her body language. *My, how things have changed from only a few months ago*, I think to myself.

The holiday season is approaching quickly, yet all I can think about at the moment is that afternoon all the way back in June when Betty called me into her office. At the time, I was putting the final touches on a highly productive and successful second year of teaching in this independent school setting. *Back then, I never would have imagined such a fall from grace could*

occur. I was on a roll then, having been selected to lead professional development sessions for my colleagues; to represent the high school faculty body and speak about our program in front of large audiences of community stakeholders; to attend galas with the president at local institutions. These were all new experiences that I was proud to have earned. To top it all off, the school year had culminated on a high-note in the form of the most extraordinary teacher evaluation rating of my entire career.

That afternoon, Betty confided in me that I was her favorite teacher in the entire school. I recall the most intense, deep sense of pride flowing inside of me as Betty explained her rationale. *You work so hard to ensure that your kids learn to love the act of learning. They see your effort too, Nick. When they talk about you, it is so clear that they feel safe, honored, and loved in your presence. They know that you genuinely care about them as people. As a mom, I cannot think of anything more that I would ever desire out of a teacher for my own child.* In that moment, I realized that I had never felt so connected to a school where I have worked.

Betty's sentiment reflected a common theme of sorts. Or perhaps, it might prove more accurate to label it the single most transferrable ability/skill that follows me to and from all of the educational settings where I have served as a teacher. That is, it is the only element I do not genuinely worry about when beginning again in a new context: I will always cultivate genuine rapport with my students. This ability – which extends far deeper than possessing a strong interpersonal skill set – is the only one in my life which comes naturally. Ever since I was a child, I have had a unique ability to *sense* the emotions of others. But it moves beyond sense: I *feel* them as well. I *wear* those emotions – embodying what others are conscious and unconscious of. Each day represented a careful navigation of family members, classmates, teachers, coaches, and teammates. These took their toll on me then, and still do today despite my ongoing learning about how to control my irrational sense of empathy.

In all honestly, I self-perceived this gift as a curse for a very long time. I assumed that something was fundamentally wrong with my being. Why did I *need* one night of solitude and alone-time each weekend? It was impossible to be aware then as I am today about the reason for needing this distance from my relationships just as much as I needed intimacy. *Difficulty being fully present to oneself and one's own feelings because you are immersed in the experience of others' and what they need?* This was beyond my comprehension. My direct family had labeled me as just the opposite of empathic – selfish, greedy, and uncaring – for so long that these had been internalized as truth. I carried these into adulthood. I was a sponge – wet and full of other peoples' emotions – yet unaware.

On the upside, I have a natural gift for relating to others. Betty recognized this without ever having stepped foot in my class, which meant that it came from my students. They felt connected to me. Although I had yet to truly comprehend the causes and effects of my 'empath' nature, Offshore Academy's institutional culture had both honored this area of self and provided

a metaphorical space to explore it further. It was more than just an educational institution to me; it had become such a significant part of my identity as well.

June was such a wonderful month. Doug had extended to me a teacher evaluation so excellent that it was far surpassed anything that I had achieved in my career. Soon thereafter, Dr. Smith – our school president - had selected me to lead the design and implementation of one of the most innovative, groundbreaking courses ever to be offered at Offshore.

However, Betty's sentiment on that June day proved paramount to all other accolades that I had received. *Why do place so much value on her opinion?* A clear answer emerges: Betty had validated my own self-actualization work as a person. *I was trustworthy, thoughtful, and hard-working.*

As I walk into Doug's office, I cannot help but think about how if that June afternoon were a geographic space, it would very far away from this morning in late November. I imagine the June space as an island with a tropical climate. *When I am here, the pressure in my chest lightens. I drink beer instead of coffee. I'm tanned and completely present. Those who I care about most are here with me. We laugh often. I take care of them.* The voice inside of me grows louder. *I wish there was a path that leads back to that place.* My chest tightens. "That place" is a metaphorical mental space framed by my own positive self-image as both a person and an educator.

The inevitable occurs. My thoughts seem to automatically shift from those of the unparalleled success I experienced over the duration of my first two years at this private school to those of blame. *Stop it. This never ends well. Empty beer bottles, headaches, sunburn, and sore muscles. Frustration. Missed phone calls.* My internal gaze momentarily shifts back to the numerous forms of institutional recognition which served to validate my positionality as an elite teacher within the context of this school. Bits of prose from my most recent teacher evaluation stir within my mind. *"Nick's thinking about education is elite", "Student-centered craftsman", "Consummate professional", "Self-reflective", "Collaborative".* I recall how unbelievably proud these words made my parents. *They would be so disappointed right now.*

I snap back to the present. The door is closed, but I can see Betty at her desk through the sliver of rectangular glass that now serves as my portal to the outside world. Her cautiousness towards me this morning is slowly beginning to sink in. I feel utterly toxic. *I'm lost. I'm broken. I'm burnt out.*

You are not a victim! Stop making excuses. A private school is a business and you are merely an employee. Let it go!

Ah, rationale, the logic that serves as an elixir to the emotion that clouds judgment. I know that I'm supposed to relentlessly trust my conscious voice. *But this situation proves to be a*

rare exceptionality. Deep down, in the space that alerts me when I know something directly without analytic reasoning, my intuition persists.

You've been taken advantage of, Nick. You've done nothing wrong. Speak your truth.

I acknowledge my inner voice. *Yes, my perspective is valuable*. Logic pleads back, “*But your truth is not popular!*”

“So”, Doug begins. My head is hanging over my shoulders. I have no will to argue anymore. I raise my eyes to meet his. “Where is the *old* Nick?”

Initial Analysis

I read and re-read the written narrative represented through this vignette for weeks on end, searching for specific individuals and events to which I could attribute my experience of teacher burnout. According to Olsen (2016), the notion of teacher burnout is characterized by a persistent sense of exhaustion, hopelessness, or powerlessness that decreases one’s effectiveness and satisfaction with teaching. Those three descriptors - exhaustion, hopelessness, and powerlessness – represent the disappointments which ultimately lead to a loss of purpose on behalf of the teacher. This description of teacher burnout still feels much too sanitary. Rudow’s (1999) description of burnout as a “crisis” is more accurate representation of the phenomena. Rudow explains, “This is a stressful, continuous, changing process of the person that is characterized by destabilization of psychic action, regulation, or organization, together with destabilization in the emotional sphere, shown by severe mood changes, doubts, and disappointments” (p. 55). And although the crisis begins as one of occupational identity, it will – and does – generalize the entire self-concept of the teacher. It can expand into a life crisis. I desperately wanted to place the burden of blame on those responsible for the persistent sense of exhaustion, hopelessness, and powerlessness that had swept over me so quickly, all but diminishing my satisfaction with teaching in this private school context (Olsen, 2016). It was, and remains, one of the most traumatic experiences of my life. If I can direct the blame

externally, I reckoned, then perhaps I can begin to heal. Yet I struggle to blame others – I always have. Although I may become angry, frustrated, or even disappointed in others, it proves impossible to remove the burden of blame from my own possession.

I *want* to blame the administration team: my department head, the high school administrators, and the school president. For a number of years, we had cultivated a strong sense of reciprocal trust. They assigned me task after task, which I dutifully completed. I carried an assumption that the nature of schooling was not like that of a business; the tales of greed and deception passed on by my direct family members from more traditional professional fields did not apply to *my* field. ‘Get it in writing’; ‘Nobody is irreplaceable’; ‘Trust nobody’ and ‘Never be deterred by the word ‘no’ - find a way’. Together, these pieces of advice illustrated a picture of modern society which did not sit well with me— one filled with human beings who are inherently selfish and untrustworthy.

Such a reality suggests that conflict is evident. And for some reason, that *scared* me. Illogical as it seems, I reminded myself time and time again about the life lessons I had learned while playing college football – the most powerful being an awareness that when other routes were unavailable, I did not hesitate to run *through* another person. This was a gut-check that welcomed time and time again in the face of danger. *Why was I cowering now?* A brief examination of the facts suggests that I would have been keen to embrace the advice I had so willingly disregarded.

The summer before this critical incident began on such a positive note. A direct supervisor at Barrel School had nominated me for a highly selective, international summer residency program. The administration at Offshore Academy had graciously provided the required letter of administrative support which was required and clearly understood the extent of

the demands associated with the all-expenses paid professional development opportunity. Offshore actually posted my accomplishment prominently for display on the school website. I understood that this would be an especially busy summer. As such, I architected a daily schedule that provided plenty of time to honor my commitments of teaching summer school at Barrel School, designing the Innovative Partnership course, and completing the research requirements associated with the summer residency program.

After teaching summer school, I returned home each afternoon and devoted countless hours to developing the ‘Innovative Partnership’ course. There was little in the way of information provided about the course content, purpose, or goals. Unlike traditional curriculum development activities, I was told, developing this course entailed the establishment of professional, working partnerships with local, state, and nationally recognized institutions. Dr. Smith, our school president, had confidently identified a number of specific institutions that would allow our school to leverage our state-of-the-art technological platform to save their needs. “Our partners”, he had blatantly called them. I did not mind at all that I was only being compensated for a single week of work. In truth, I was both humbled and honored to be chosen to lead such an important part of our school’s work.

Very quickly, though, it became clear that things were not as they seemed. My calls to local institutions were left unreturned, or worse, met with a response that demonstrated no knowledge of or interest in a partnership with our school. I took time to visit these sites personally, only to leave rejected or despondent. *This course was misrepresented,* I thought to myself. By mid-summer, it had become clear that I would have to establish both the curriculum *and* community partnerships on my own. This process proved to be time consuming and soon I had fallen behind schedule pertaining to my residency requirements. It was also during this time

period that the administration suddenly expressed hesitation regarding my participation in the international residency because it conflicted with the first week of the school year. I had already taken steps to inform the international organization whom had reimbursed me in full for my travel itinerary by the time the lead administrator called me to express a ‘change of heart’ and support.

It was too late. I had already coordinated with all of the parties involved to allow a colleague from Barrel School to take my place in the residency program. Subsequently, I was responsible for a few thousand dollars’ worth of travel reimbursements. In an uncommon move – which came only after discussing the issue with trusted colleagues and family members - I mustered up the courage to bring my issues to the attention of Offshore Academy. More specifically, I argued that the school was responsible for reimbursing the substantial costs I had incurred. After all, I had dutifully followed their directions *and* orders. My argument was rejected, but with a positive stipulation. Although there were no funds to which provide reimbursement, the lead administrator explained that I would accompany the school president on an international trip scheduled for later in the semester which had a purpose directly related to the ‘Innovative Partnership’ course I had cultivated. In sum, I was left in debt yet hopeful. The president, I was told, need not be informed of my plight that summer.

School began in the fall and work became hectic – a blurry time-period of deteriorating psychical and mental health. The international trip did not happen. Further, the administration went as far as to deny such plans even existed. Simultaneously, my department head prescribed a brand new curriculum for the other course we taught concurrently – this included the inclusion of an entire novel into our instructional plans as well. The demands of designing, coordinating, and instructing the Innovative Partnership course while redesigning all aspects of the other course

wore deeply on me. I recall feeling unsatisfied with the amount of time and individualized feedback available for each of my students because I could *feel* that I was losing many of them. Teenagers are going to push boundaries. Puberty, the search for identity, friendships, relationships, and role expectations are all part of the moody blizzard that is mental, physical, social, emotional, and moral development. The role of the teacher is not to prevent boundary-breaking, rather, it is to help students understand why certain boundaries were put there in the first place. However, once aware that their teacher is unable to hold them fully accountable in any number of regards, any number of bad habits can form. To put it in general terms, a negative vibe becomes established.

The administration, as a whole, was largely unaware of the demands upon me. They did not communicate effectively. I felt *used* and *betrayed*. I am supposed to let this go. I *want* to forget that this happened and move on. But I did my job to an extent that made real impacts on this school; I sacrificed time and energy – a personal life – to successfully meet the targets and goals placed upon me. I cannot just forget how the administration questioned my pursuit of a doctorate, insinuating that I should just drop the effort all together after completing all of my coursework. I deserved better.

Even when they became well-aware of this, I was none-the-less ‘hung out to dry’. This was a ‘Nick’ problem. I *want* to blame them all. I *should* blame them. But I cannot do so. Over time, I have come to respect these individuals. Despite their actions, I still care about them deeply.

As I wrote this initial analysis, I frustratingly thought to myself, “This was supposed to be an *easy* process. Why is this taking so long?”

An internal voice responds, “Bias, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder”.

I listen to the voice. The last time I had this much difficulty letting go of the past was when I had my heart broken for the first time. “Man” I chuckle to myself, “I was so stubborn back then”.

My father is never shy to share elements of his personal philosophy; members of my direct family deem these nuggets of wisdom, developed over the course of a lifetime, in a tongue-in-cheek manner as his “isms”. Unlike the rest of my family, I’m captivated by my father’s advice. He’s certainly not an academic. His “isms” reflect a different type of knowledge; one that is attained when a working-class background meets the realities of New Jersey’s often vicious, back-stabbing, “who do you *know*?” business culture. In this sense, his “isms” sit at the intersection between theory (the way things are supposed to be) and practice (the way things actually are). One of his “isms” is running through my mind as I try to make sense of this analysis.

“God gave you two of these” my father would say, pointing at both of his ears, “and one of these” adjusting his hands to point at his mouth. He would then get on his ‘bully pulpit’, which I inferred came with fatherhood. A lecture would then begin. It was not about the value of listening. In the typical blunt, in-your-face New Jersey fashion, I was told explicitly about the value of closing one’s mouth. Those unfamiliar with our culture might view this discourse as comical, harsh, or even shallow. “Closing one’s mouth” is more complex than the physical act entails. You see, this “ism” was only shared when my father believed that I was making excuses.

Accepting responsibility has always been a core value of my immediate family. It was never the teacher’s/coach’s/police officer’s/anyone else’s fault. It was *your* fault. Even when it was not. You didn’t play as much as you wanted to in the junior varsity basketball game? That’s your fault – improve your ball-handling skills. You got pulled over by the same police officer

each day this week for your window tint? That's your fault – drive a car that does not garner as much attention. Your failed your math test? That's your fault – you did not try hard enough. I don't completely understand this logic behind this sentiment either, but the value did serve to instill within me a habit of looking in the mirror when conflict arises in my life.

The internal voice once again calls to me, “Bias, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder”.

The term ‘bias’ is generally understood as referring to an individual's internalized – but often unrealized – preferences for or assumptions about a certain group. In this instance, a self-awareness of my own bias was spurred by an explicit consciousness pertaining to the sheer contrast between the period of burnout and that of my experiences over the course of my first two years teaching in this private school context.

The narrative that I had *intended* to construct here was aimed at identifying the factors attributing to my case of teacher burnout. What developed instead was a narrative that told a much different story than I had planned. In this light, the actors take on a new significance. Each has played a unique role in support of my development as an institutionally distinguished, “elite” educator. If these characters were in fact the villains I had originally painted them to be, my departure from the school would clearly be self-perceived in much more of a positive light.

And that's not the truth. Leaving this private school setting was a painful experience; the equivalent of an ‘educational broken-heart’ of sorts. My department head, administrators, and the school president – they represented, collectively, the first administrative team that I had ever truly trusted. The presidents' vision, combined with the administration's holistic philosophy of education, provided me with the tools, inspiration, and autonomy to re-conceptualize the very dynamics of teaching and learning. In contrast, my department head's firm, practical, and

supportive leadership style served as a very helpful grounding force to ensure that was not overwhelmed by the significant yet vaguely defined expectations placed upon me. As a whole, the system I worked within had been instrumental in bringing to light a potential of which I had previously been unaware.

As such, the investigative lens is shifted from its current direction of focusing externally to gaze inward instead. There was more to explore.

I pose a question to myself: *Why was this school so important to you?*

Critical Catalyst

Constructing the initial analysis of this critical incident proved to be a most painful process. In fact, I successfully avoided the task for a number of months, busying myself with other responsibilities instead. “After all”, I tried to convince myself, “there are lessons to plan, grading to be completed, other narratives/vignettes to construct, etc”. Every now and then, I would bump into my former students and/or their parents, whose collective positive sentiment brought me down to my knees mentally. Amongst others, I recall being approached in a restaurant by a pair of former students, who cried as they revealed that I was the individual who brought out their ‘voices’ – helping them to explore and locate their beliefs and values while encouraging them to ‘own’ these voices in an intellectually-safe environment. I do not describe this experience to validate my professional practice or abilities; autoethnography is certainly not a tool for self-validation. Shifting the lens of this investigation to my response to this wonderful sentiment reveals perceptions about my burnout experience that lay hidden, perhaps purposely, for months. Instead of feeling validated or appreciated, I was ashamed and remorseful. I blamed myself for feeling disrespected and disempowered, but was unwilling to confront these feelings for fear of provoking them. This led to burnout.

In order to avoid the guilt-ridden existence that resulted from reflection on my experience, I attempted to bury my feelings. It is likely that I would have avoided confronting this experience even longer if not for a fateful appointment I made with a new eye doctor about 6 months later.

I sat in the exam room, lost in my own thoughts while waiting for the doctor to see me. I had been thinking about the future a lot, envisioning my life through the lens of the different professional roles that I might one day adopt. In truth, I did not believe that any future accomplishments could replace the stigma of failure that had become internalized.

“Mr. P!” The excitement in the doctor’s voice not only broke the silence, but also startled me a bit. It took a few moments for me to put two and two together, but I quickly came to realization that the doctor was addressing my ‘teacher-self’. It’s not uncommon to run into students and their families outside of the school context in Hawai‘i. Instinctually, I tried to remember this doctor’s last name so that I could identify her son or daughter. She beat me to it.

“My daughter loved your class! She never enjoyed history until she met you. You were her favorite teacher. She really misses you”.

I was taken aback by the doctor’s positive words. Simultaneously, a negative feeling began building in my gut. My body tensed up. This was my fight-or-flight response, which occurs when an individual is faced with what he or she perceives to be a harmful event, attack, or threat to survival. It presented itself because of my anticipation of what her next question would be. In fact, I *knew* what it would be. It has been asked of me many times, yet I’ve never responded in the same way.

“Why did you leave?”

That evening, I sat down and reflected upon what I perceived to be the sheer ‘irrationality’ of my feelings when asked about this specific topic.

What was it about this question that ignites in me a desire to ‘run for the hills’? An investigation of the fear that drives this avoidance led to the location of a wide array of emotions. Frustration. Shame. Pride. Anger. Passion. Guilt. Embarrassment. Resentment. Interesting enough, the process of critical reflection began by asking myself the simple question, “Why?” An exploration of my emotionality highlights the assumptions, beliefs, and perceptions that informed my behaviors and responses. The result is a reflexive account through which multiple layers of consciousness are displayed.

This vignette represents a larger story about a two entities simultaneously searching for an identity: a private school and a teacher. While the identity construction of both entities is intertwined, the relationship that exists between them is not equal. Bullough (2005) explains this complicated association, noting that institutions like schools tend to prefer and support the formation of certain kinds of professional identities above others, both limiting and enabling the identity formations of the teachers. More explicitly, teachers’ options for identity formation are both produced and constrained by the context or situation in which they are teaching. Because they formed in specific contexts, teacher identities are what Alsup (2006) calls “situational identities”... made available by the specific cultural and institutional contexts of schooling. Each individual school context and community varies and has its own ideologies, shared beliefs and values, and norms that make meaning construction possible. Traditionally the balance of power in this relationship leans heavily in favor of the institution. My experience proved complex due to the institution’s positionality as a private school in the early stages of a rebranding effort. Although the balance of power remained heavily in favor of the institution, the structures that

historically serve to frame teachers' identity formation – e.g. practices and policies regarding teaching, learning, and assessment that function within schools – were blurred due to the autonomy provided by the private school context in addition to the impact of this transition on all levels and divisions of the school.

Today, I compare my experience as a teacher at Offshore Academy to that of riding a roller coaster. The majority of my tenure at this school correlates to the long, gradual ascent which riders experience as they are propelled to the top of the attraction. Riders are generally excited by the new perspectives attained and the potential possibilities as the cars lurch higher and higher. As humans, we crave the experience itself; the exhilaration and satisfaction of self-affirmation. By simulating true danger, roller coasters provide riders with an illusion of mastering a great peril. My ascent at Offshore Academy was characterized by the cultivation of a remarkably satisfying teacher identity resulting from what I had perceived as a reciprocally beneficial relationship between teacher and school. Yet deep inside, the success that I experienced was perceived as similar the illusion generated by a roller coaster. That is, I was never fully content with myself as an educator nor as a person. Various instances of institutional and interpersonal recognition served to foster the cultivation of a positive teacher identity of which I *feared* losing. After years of teaching in numerous contexts characterized by struggle and insecurity, I had finally arrived in a supportive professional environment – a school culture of mutual trust, respect, openness, and commitment and focus upon personal and professional growth. I would do *anything* to remain

Eventually, however, the riders reach the peak of the ascent and subsequently plunge down a steep drop to the bottom in mere seconds. All of the elevation gained over a period time is suddenly lost. When the ride is over, the most significant memory held by riders is of the brief

plunge due to its terrifying/thrilling/exhilarating nature. My ‘plunge’ occurred quickly as well; the positive teacher identity that I had cultivated over the course of two years seemingly fell apart in mere months. The ‘plunge’ in this story is represented by a progressively worsening case of teacher burnout from which I could not successfully navigate.

As I tried to make sense of the experience, and in the subsequent year that has seen me move back into the realm of public education, I find that I have never been able to think about this story without taking into account the constructs of class, race, and ethnicity. Through a critical lens, I offer my own sense making in the form of a reexamination and reevaluation of the “multiplicities” of identity, acknowledging that experiences cannot be taken in isolation.

Critical Analysis: Layer 1

The beginning of my tenure at Offshore Academy coincided with the institution’s completion of a holistic ‘Master Plan’ that served to identify and guide all aspects of the school’s rebranding process. Architected by Dr. Smith, who began serving in the role of School President earlier in the year, the “Master Plan” was introduced to the entire K-12 school faculty during the opening week of activities that preceded the regular school year. Standing on a stage in the school’s massive auditorium, Dr. Smith spoke eloquently and with passion about Offshore’s rich tradition of “renewal and growth”, two concepts which universally resonated with all layers of my identity. Behind him, the new school logo was projected onto a massive screen. The term “Offshore” was positioned in the center of the screen. Directly under this term were three concepts presented in a slightly smaller font-size.” Dr. Smith described each of the items as “foundational components” of our school identity. I observed as Dr. Smith began his presentation of each item in a manner that portrayed our school as the original ‘owner’ of each identity. “Offshore”, he asserted, “has a rich history of *so and so*”. Citing Offshore Academy’s

“historical legacy” of valuing growth and renewal, Dr. Smith concluded his presentation and walked off the stage. In sum, the school had self-positioned as an incubator of sorts, fostering the holistic development of a globally aware, critically thinking, and socially responsible student body capable of leveraging technology to innovate new solutions for the complex problems faced by an increasingly globalized world.

Critical reflection reveals the social, cultural, and political influences that impacted the institution’s decision to rebrand. Dr. Smith had generated and was perpetuating a narrative about the institution’s past for the purpose of justifying his vision for the future direction of the school. In line with this rationale, the rebranding process was presented as an effort to “define our position in the community on our own terms”. Reflection on the rebranding process in this private school setting reveals that it is in many ways similar in nature to the reform efforts that have increasingly characterized our nation’s public education system over the last two decades. The contemporary context of schooling locates both types of educational settings in an era of immense societal changes brought about by the advent of globalization. As I had learned first-hand through previous experience, public schools teachers’ work during this “standards era” has become increasingly driven by accountability and high-stakes testing. In line with the sentiment of Dillabough (1999), I argue that such institutionalized teacher standards often act to marginalize and repress individual beliefs and experiences, depersonalizing teaching and limiting options for teacher identity. Independent school reform in Hawai‘i, however, was much more complicated. Its dominant discourses, the subjectivities shaped, and power/knowledge/truth are not always clearly visible or even tangible.

Regardless, Offshore Academy exposed me to a model of teaching and learning that seemed to ‘fit’ perfectly with all of the dimensions informing my teacher identity. To borrow

from Bourdieu (1993), I use the concept of ‘field’ in order to describe the sheer significance of Offshore Academy’s impact on my teacher identity. ‘Fields’ can be defined as distinct cultural and social realities; sites where certain beliefs and values are established and imposed on people within it through the various relations and practices that occur. In this sense, fields are sites of ideological production. Bourdieu describes how individuals within the field become so caught up with that field’s practices, both emotionally and intellectually, that they start to live within the confines of the field and its values. They begin to inhabit the field “like a garment” (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 143), comfortable inside it and displaying their own identity by wearing it. This sentiment sums up my situation at Offshore Academy. My experiences within this private school context disrupted my former perspective about what constituted various forms of ‘good’ and ‘appropriate’ within the context of schooling. ‘Good’ teaching positioned the teacher as a facilitator. ‘Good’ learning was a student-driven process infused with relevance and authenticity. And so on and so forth.

I excelled in this system, which complicates the attainment of an understanding of the roots of my teacher burnout. Yet the simple act of acknowledging the painful emotions connected to my departure from this educational setting provide a roadmap of sorts from which to begin this journey. As I referred to at the end of the Initial Analysis section, such emotions indicate that this school meant something very significant to me – otherwise, moving forward would have been a much easier task. Critical reflection into my beliefs, values, held assumptions, and ideologies –investigating my own identity – marked the starting point for this analyses. Reflecting upon my experiences as both a student and educator in other settings revealed that I avoided actively questioning institutional discourses, policy mandates, expectations, etc. As a former public school teacher prior to entering this private school setting, the ‘system’ represented

the only ‘truth’ I knew pertaining to the field of education. Having been socialized into this held-perception since childhood, I felt little in with way of agency to alter it. I did what I was told in order to protect my job. Critical reflection has enabled me to highlight the significance of my primary disposition to appease school administration members by conforming to institutional demands at the expense of my own beliefs, values, overall well-being. My perception about the role of the educator – and the conflict I experienced pertaining to my teacher identity at Offshore Academy - can be attributed to a complex blend of elements which emerge through an reexamination of my cultural upbringing, socioeconomic status, and positionality within the normative structures that characterized all of the educational contexts where I had worked before joining Offshore Academy.

My positionality as a ‘cultural insider’ while growing up in suburban New Jersey afforded me access to the possession of the three forms of cultural capital which Bourdieu (1986) argues support the acquisition of competence in society’s high status culture. In the embodied state, cultural capital takes the form of long lasting dispositions of the body and mind. As a White male of middle-class means, culture was an invisible force and the power of dominant norms taken for granted. The dominant Euro-American values associated with my upbringing framed identity as ‘what one does’ for a living over ‘who one is’ as a person. In line with this, one of the most significant insults located within the discourse of my cultural upbringing involved being labeled as dependent or reliant on others. The preoccupation with upward mobility demonstrates an adherence to the middle-class ideology of individualism. Jung (2007) explains, “In the middle-class conception, the individual is unfettered by family or other group affiliations, and one is afforded equality of opportunity to make the best of oneself” (p. 7). Rationality was taught to be the basis for decision making and major guide for behavioral norms.

The emphasis placed upon the rational self rendered emotionality problematic – something to be managed, controlled, and disciplined (Jung, 2007).

Critically reexamining the taken-for-granted assumptions that colored my perception of teacher identity reveals a point of conflict pertaining to the concept of emotion. Until twenty years ago, professional literature pertaining to teacher emotions was sparse at best. Zembylas (2003) attributes the historical lack of research in this area to the prejudice against emotion in Western culture. Today, teacher emotion is regarded as an important research topic due to heightened attrition rates within the profession. Research demonstrate that teachers' emotional practice and teacher identity are entwined (Hargreaves, 1998, Zembylas, 2005). This insight serves as a counter-narrative to the 'myth of normalcy' perpetuated in society which frames teaching as a "relatively uncomplicated...culturally and socially uncontroversial professional choice" (Alsup, 2006, p. 63). This discourse denies teacher emotionality during an era of schooling in which "competing forces of regulation, deregulation, professionalization in education, as well as technological advancement, are continually changing what it means to teach and be a teacher" (Hallman & Burdick, 2014, p. 53). I perceived my negative emotions pertaining to the manner by which those in power at Offshore Academy framed and assigned the 'Innovative Partnership' course as unacceptable due to the deeply embedded cultural values of my upbringing as well as the normative structures existent in all of the school contexts where I had worked.

Demonstrating any emotion, positive or negative, contradicted the perception of "professionalism" that I had cultivated. Elevated levels of stress attributed to the demands of my work and a perceived lack of control over my daily activities were to be ignored. My parents embodied the baby-boomer generation mentality of "no news is good news" – as such, I was

discouraged from displaying behaviors that might draw attention to myself. My lack of knowledge pertaining to teacher identity prevented me from navigating these feelings. Instead, I attempted to ‘bury’ them and move forward. Focusing on a positive aspect of the situation at hand, I acknowledged that the course represented formal institutional recognition of Offshore Academy’s belief in my abilities to develop an innovative curriculum on such a large scale. Despite this, I could not ignore the emotions that I embodied as a result of having to cancel what I had perceived to be a career-defining, transformative cultural experience. I interpreted Doug’s decision not to fully reimburse me as an effort to deny any fault on the school’s behalf, which manifested through more negative emotions. I felt *taken-for-granted*, *underappreciated*, and *used*. These were certainly not feelings that a ‘good’ teacher experienced. Further, the “master narrative” perpetuated by society pertaining to my positionality in the institutional context of a private school in Hawai‘i served to reinforce the notion of my own ‘superiority’ as an educator. Part of this narrative positions only the most intelligent, skilled, and devoted teachers in private schools. Good teachers, I assumed, did not experience negative emotions on such a consistent basis. None-the-less, a counter-narrative had already formed in my consciousness: In private schools, teachers are expected (supposed) to behave like pliant instruments of institutional demands.

An examination of my social class orientation provides keen insight into the conflicted sense of teacher identity that I possessed during this time period. This critical exploration resulted from a deeper analysis of my reaction - or lack thereof - to Doug’s response refusing me reimbursement for the residency in London. According to my parents, I have always been middle-class. Yet an examination of my family’s history reveals that both of my parents were born into and raised within working-class families. My father’s family was supported by his

father's income as a coal miner and machinist. His mother worked as a seamstress in order to support the family as well. After graduating from high school, he was drafted by the government to serve in the Vietnam War and then briefly attended a community college before dropping out and entering the workforce. My mother's family is positioned at the lower end of the working class spectrum. Her mother and father separated early in her childhood due to her father's struggles with alcoholism and abuse. She and her two older sisters were raised by their single mother, who supported the family through her employment as a retail worker. The family struggled to pay bills and moved between apartments often. My mother completed high school and entered the workforce as a dental assistant soon thereafter. My parents could not afford to have a traditional wedding and instead were married, having a small ceremony in my father's backyard. In addition, they were unable to exchange wedding rings until years later as a result of their financial issues. My father struggled with alcoholism until my older brother was born. From this point forward, he swore off alcohol and gradually built a successful janitorial and industrial supply business that he continues to run by himself to this day.

I have thus inherited uncertainty about my class position, wondering if we have denied our working-class roots in our determination to be middle-class. Critical examination reveals that despite the presence of a middle-class income and values, I have also subtly inherited many of my parents' working-class values as well. These emphasize external standards and include being obedient, following rules, respecting and deferring to authority, and possessing little tolerance for deviance. These directly contradict middle-class values which emphasize internal standards such as self-direction, curiosity, leadership, and a tolerance for non-conformity (Schutz, Ursprung & Wossmann, 2008). The discovery of my family's unclear social position promotes an awareness of the role that social class plays in the formation of teacher identity, specifically

pertaining to the construct of agency. I entered the teaching profession with hidden values and assumptions that proved contradictory to one another. In line with the values that drive the dominant middle-class culture, I was self-reliant, hard-working, and highly competitive. My positionality as a millennial who entered the workforce during a period of sustained recession and limited employment opportunities served to reinforce these concepts. The master narrative I had cultivated involved “making my own luck” through relentless effort and hard work. However, my working-class socialization positioned my identity as an individual who was largely unwilling to directly challenge authority for fear of losing my job and thus becoming reliant and/or dependent. My inability to speak up, for fear of drawing negative attention to myself, proved detrimental to my navigation of the emotionality within the teacher identity conflict storied here.

My positionality within the educational contexts where I had worked before joining Offshore Academy served to reinforce my taken-for-granted assumptions about the role of the educator. I entered Hawai‘i’s teaching ranks during the middle of the recession that began in 2007, which led to sustained, multi-year reductions in the revenue streams of school districts, along with many private and public entities. School districts took a variety of actions to absorb these cuts, primarily by increasing class size, reducing employee pay, eliminating or delaying instructional improvement initiatives, conducting layoffs of school employees, or closing schools (Ellerson, 2012). The combination of a severe teacher shortage and my possession of a Master’s Degree and actual teaching experience seemed promising, but I could not even get an interview. After months of waiting tables while actively searching for employment, I considered myself lucky to attain a part-time teaching position at a Hawai‘i charter school. Teachers within Hawai‘i’s charter school system are technically employed by both the state Board of Education

and the local school board governing the charter. Fukumoto (1991) notes “one of the overriding principles of charter schools generally is that they are designed to be more autonomous than public schools, including freedom from various legal constraints limiting the flexibility of public schools” (p. 46). The autonomy provided to charter schools under Hawai‘i law places the power to hire and fire personnel in the hands of the local school board as opposed to the Board of Education. As a result, charter school teachers cannot gain the credits required for earning tenure and are thus the subject of “at will” employment. In my experience at this particular charter school, the lack of job protection afforded to charter school teachers manifested into a culture of administrative ‘bullying’ which was characterized by high rates of staff turnover.

As a result of my positionality, I was hesitant to challenge the dominant discourses which served to marginalize educators in this setting. In contrast, I felt genuinely *grateful* to have a job at all as many of my colleagues still remained unemployed. In light of accusations of fraud and ethics violations, and the negative media attention which followed, our school leader demanded “blind loyalty” on behalf of all employees. In line with the Foucauldian (1980) argument that subjects are constituted within power relations, my options seemed limited at the time. Despite a record of success and advancement in this setting, I understood that I was replaceable. This discourse was reinforced through a number of unsettling interrogations under the guise weekly teacher meetings with the administration. I recall the accusatory “Are you applying to other schools? We can and will paint a negative picture of you to these schools if we find out”. Because the workings of power are hidden, they are given the status of truth and are linked to particular knowledges. I was in fact searching for a more stable teaching position. Yet I was *wrong* for doing so. I knew I was wrong because of the real consequences of becoming unemployed if caught in the act of searching. Society, in general, perpetuates a dominant

discourse that, to a significant extent, equates the unemployed with an overall deficiency as a human being.

I left Lineup Charter School only after successfully Negotiating Onshore High School's initial offer a half-line position coordinating a student-centered health program into a full-line which included Social Studies as well. This way, I would be able to immediately begin earning a probationary form of credit that would count towards achieving tenure in the future. There was not much time to embrace the feeling of relief which swept over me with the knowledge that I was now removed from the ongoing, dynamic conflicts which characterized teaching at Lineup Charter School. I was explicitly told by my new principal that the state funding which covered the coordination portion of my teaching line was set to expire after the current school year. As such, it was *unlikely* that I would be rehired the following year. Accordingly, I dedicated much effort that year demonstrating to the principal that I was a 'team player' who adhered to all school mandated policies. I embraced the subjectivities which were available, even volunteering to attend the IEP meetings each week in the unpopular (amongst teachers) role of 'general education teacher'. In all, these efforts were rewarded at the end of the school year when another position was eliminated instead of mine. The principal even went as far as to protect my line from tenured teachers who had the contractual right to 'bump' me by classifying it as a specialty position, which in turn granted her the authority to hold it for me. In sum, any sense of personal agency which I might have assumed that I possessed was tightly bound within the policy-driven discourse of the public school system. Maintaining employment meant attaining a favorable teacher-evaluation rating. In turn, I adjusted all aspects of my pedagogy in an effort to conform to a multitude of 'best' practices as outlined by the Hawai'i Department of Education.

An invisible truth, reinforced through years of experience, informed my perspective about the role of teachers by the time I entered Offshore Academy. *‘Good’ teachers do what they are told. A ‘good’ teacher is one who maintains gainful employment.*

Creative Writing Measure: “My First Day”

My first day at Offshore Academy was memorable because of the irony that I would eventually attribute to it years later. Along with over a dozen other new faculty members, I had attended a morning of school-mandated meetings aimed at orienting us to all aspects of this new environment. While the thought of ‘school-mandated meetings’ might sound a bit dull to some educators, I vividly recall how wonderful that morning was. The school president, administrative team, and my fellow faculty members collectively embodied a positive sentiment which I had previously been unaccustomed to. I can best describe it this way: I remained quite positive throughout a teaching career within a contexts characterized by negative school cultures. In fact, I had learned to function exceedingly well despite various contextual realities which should have impeded this ability. I was taken-aback by my new environment – appreciative to an extent beyond what many others present might comprehend.

The afternoon consisted of a large block of unstructured time during which all teachers were expected to begin readying their respective classrooms for the official start of the school year. Experienced teachers were also on campus that afternoon, preparing their classrooms as well.

Opening the door to my new classroom revealed that various day-to-day class essentials were missing. I walked down the hallway and into the classroom next to mine in the hopes that the teacher there might lend an extra stapler, a pair of scissors, etc. After introductions, I asked

my new colleague – Keala - if she would be able to spare a number of specific classroom supplies.

To my surprise, she implored me to take *anything* from her desk that I wished.

Anything!

She had a veteran air about her as she methodically showed me where different supplies were located around the classroom. Simultaneously, she provided bits of insight about how she had inherited this specific classroom and her projects to improve it. Gradually, I came to understand that Keala had been teaching at Offshore Academy for over a decade.

I remember feeling very appreciative and taken-aback by her generosity. After filling an entire shopping bag with supplies from my generous neighbor, I turned to Keala

“Can I return these before you leave today? I should pick up items tonight for the year ahead so I only need to borrow these for a few hours” I said with a smile.

Keala’s response caught me completely off guard.

“Keep them all, Nick” she said in tone which existed somewhere on the spectrum in between *frustrated* and *confident*.

I did not have time to wipe the smile off of my face before Keala followed.

“I quit. This place is absolutely awful. Watch out for other teachers and especially the administration. The woman who you took over for was an amazing teacher. We were both given poor evaluations this year. We spoke up about a few key issues here and now that she has left, they are after me. Good luck”.

I could not voice any sort of meaningful response, but quickly felt self-conscious about the smile which was still on my face. Although I removed it, I could think of nothing to replace my blank stare with. This was an awkward situation to say the very least.

Meekly, I mouthed a hushed ‘thank you’ and left the classroom. I have not seen Keala since, but Hawai‘i is a small place and I am aware that she is currently teaching in another private school setting.

The new teacher was the first person to find out that Keala was leaving her teaching position less than one week before the school year was to begin. I did not tell anyone about this experience.

I do recall thinking to myself: *I pray that never happens to me.*

My subconscious – the result of the previous experiences described in the last section – served to integrate this experience into my knowledge in a manner which positioned Keala as the *problem*.

In truth, I never entertained the possibility that the institution itself could truly carry fault.

After all, ‘good’ teachers did what they were told.

At this juncture, I became aware that the dominant discourses embedded in the professional and situated dimensions of my teacher identity had been so continuously reinforced that they had pervaded my consciousness to such an extent that I perceived them as ‘truths’.

Critical Analysis: Layer 2

An exploration of why Offshore Academy’s institutional practices and policies correlated so positively to the development of my satisfying teacher identity reveals further insight into the contextual and subjective nature of teacher identity formation. Critical reflection reveals two elements, in particular, that I perceived as playing significant roles in my ability to thrive as an educator in this private school environment. The first element identified was teacher autonomy, which refers to the professional independence of teachers in schools, especially the degree to which they can make autonomous decisions about what they teach to students and how they

teach it. Closely related, the second element involved the lack of high stakes testing procedures and other accountability measures. Together, these values led to a deeper investigation of own identity, beginning with insight attained from my experience as a new teacher in New Jersey.

My first-year of teaching saw me positioned in a demanding public school located in an affluent New Jersey suburb. At the end of the school year, my novice-teacher self presumed that ‘good teaching’ was defined by an educator’s ability to cover all of the historical content listed in the state standards while simultaneously maintaining a strict sense of order within his or her classroom. This sentiment can be viewed as the outcome of a struggle to retain my personal identity while trying to engage successfully with the visible and invisible values and practices of a specific institutional context and at the same time managing the day-to-day intense and difficult practical demands of being a teacher.

Specifically, I viewed the veteran teachers who experienced limited classroom management issues as true ‘professionals’. I came to envy these individuals because they did not draw the attention of our department supervisor, Ms. Brown, who served the school in an administrative role that included evaluating teachers. I gradually came to fear Ms. Brown due to my own self-perception as an incompetent educator. I felt like a *fraud*. On many an occasion, she would enter my classroom unannounced and sit in the back of the classroom, quietly evaluating various aspects of my performance. Afterwards, we would first ‘discuss’ targeted areas for future growth. Although the specific use of the word ‘growth’ insinuated that I already possessed abilities, the regular occurrence and tone of these meetings gave me the impression that I was a poor educator. I perceived the topics we discussed in these meetings more so as institutional directives due to the manner in which the discourse was framed.

The topics varied. My overall grades for a class were “too high”; instead grades for each class should resemble a more realistic “rainbow” of scores. The group activity that took place during a certain class was “too loud”. My habit of engaging individual students in quiet conversations about their lives outside of the classroom – hobbies, interests, etc. - during classwork activities was “distracting” and “inappropriate”. Students, I was told, were in my class to develop the knowledge, skills, and abilities that would be measured through a summative assessment at the end of the school year. Addressing topics outside of one’s discipline was generally “not a good idea”. After the suicide of a student from within our school district, I was reprimanded for discussing mental health and suicide prevention with my freshmen classes. Ms. Brown’s intentions were genuine in that the performance of my students on these assessments weighed heavily upon the effectiveness rating which subsequently would inform the school’s decision to retain me for the following school year. All of these directives, and more, shaped my perception of both ‘good’ teaching and professionalism.

In addition to my negative outlook on classroom observations, I also developed a disdain for mandated testing measures. That year, I was assigned an additional ‘prep’ – courses that one teaches - which included an Advanced Placement class. Veteran faculty members, all of whom had less ‘preps’ than I, provided the rationale that I had to ‘pay my dues’. Preparation for each of my multiple classes generally involved learning all of the content on my own the night before so that I could recite it accurately the following day. Methods of pedagogy rarely crossed my mind because of the overwhelming situation in which I found myself situated. At the end of the school year my ‘worth’, as determined by the school district, would be identified by a combination of Ms. Brown’s teacher evaluation and my students’ results on state mandated assessments. This ongoing mental calculus gradually molded my perception of ‘good’ teaching as knowing all of

the content. The ‘content masters’ within our department seemed largely invisible to Ms. Brown – and when interaction did occur, both parties seemed to be on a much more level playing field compared to my own experiences.

In this light, a positive teacher identity was something that could be achieved through the mastery of various competencies. Most of the students in the school valued a teacher’s mastery of content knowledge because they, in turn, scored well on the summative assessments that characterized teaching and learning. My disdain for these tests grew as I learned more about the teaching profession and cultivated my own philosophy of education. When taught well, the Social Sciences foster tolerance for complexity and intolerance for general answers. Even then, I felt a necessity for my students to be able to distinguish reasoned interpretations of history from stances that seek to extinguish critical judgment. Internally, I occupied this conflicted positionality due to my disdain for standardized testing measures. After all, even a first year teacher gradually attains an awareness that his or her students are not equal. Further, I saw immense value in the skills and abilities of many students who did not fit the traditional mold of ‘good’ students. Perspective-taking ability, kindness, honesty, and integrity are not assessed in the contemporary public school model of education – yet these qualities more accurately reflect the needs of thriving in an increasingly pluralistic society.

The word ‘struggle’ resonates with many novice teachers as they attempt to establish their own position in relation to the views and practices of others within institutional contexts of schooling. I entered the teaching profession during a period which Mathison and Freeman (2003) have deemed the “outcomes based accountability era” of school reform. These environments are characterized by externally formulated goals with content standards and a strict accountability system that is usually reliant on high stakes testing. It proves difficult to maintain a positive self-

image during times of intense restructuring due to the tension that can result from the negotiation between professional responsibility and accountability, “where teachers and other professionals are challenged to reconcile their judgment and autonomy with external forces of control” (Montgomery, 2012, p. 48). A theme that became increasingly common as I gained teaching experience in public school settings is a difficulty reconciling this desired reliance with my own sense of professional identity.

Early in my career, I was unable to locate the discourses regarding the nature of professionalism within their respective historical, cultural, political, and institutional frames. Today, I attribute the root of this ‘unconsciousness’ to the White privilege that resulted from my overt lack of awareness about my racial identity. Like many Whites, I struggled to see myself as White, instead viewing Whiteness as bland and cultureless. Fitzgerald (2015) describes White privilege as:

...the privilege to *not* think about race, the privilege to *not* recognize the dominant culture as White culture rather than as racially neutral, and the privilege to overlook the fact that Whiteness, rather than being absent, is ever present as the unnamed norm. (p. 57)

In a school setting that is predominantly White, the concept of race is minimized. That is, normally where we do not see difference, questions about difference are not raised. McLaren (1998) equates the ideology of Whiteness to “a form of social amnesia” that allows White people to forget or ignore how we are implicated in the maintenance of systems of privilege and oppression. The investigation next turns to ‘class’ as a factor influencing my easily teacher identity formation

The dominant, middle-class cultural disposition in America perceives identity as defined by personal achievement, reflecting the core value of individualism. According to my parents, I have always been middle-class. As such, I was expected to demonstrate these values in order to achieve success as a student within educational settings; contexts where the middle-class ideology is deeply embedded and reinforced. It is in within the metaphorical ‘space’ between race, class, and the context of schooling where the process of critical reflection has enabled me to locate the roots of my teacher identity, which were formed long before I ever knew that I would become an educator. Race, class, and the context of schooling intertwined to inform elements of my personal identity before entering the teaching profession. A negative hue tinted my self-perception as non-intelligent, selfish, fearful, and lazy.

This image was internalized over the course of my upbringing as a result of the poor academic performance that characterized my adolescence. I was identified most commonly as an ‘underachiever’ by my parents and teachers alike, which led to my cultivation of a deep sense of guilt and confusion: Was I *dumb* or was I just *lazy*? I am aware today that my shame can be attributed to a taken-for-granted assumption of White superiority as well as a perception of middle-class cultural values as the ‘correct’ way to live’. Frankenberg (1993) provides clarity, locating Whiteness as “a ‘standpoint,’ a place from which White people look at ourselves, at others, and at society... ‘Whiteness’ refers to a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed”. Critical reflection locates the guilt that I felt as resulting from a comparison of my level of educational achievement to that which was racially, culturally, and socially expected of me. It is important to note my use of the word “expected”, which reinforces the notion of the perceived superiority that is associated with the intersectionality of a particular race and culture. This insight, in turn, sheds light on the “underachiever” label that was placed upon me by my

family and teachers. This infers an assumption that my poor academic achievement resulted from a lack of effort (which is a choice) as opposed to a lack of ability.

The expectations embedded within the combination of my White (racial) and middle-class (cultural) identity markers served as an invisible measuring bar against which my actions were compared. My positionality as a member of both the dominant race and culture afforded me the privilege of not recognizing the metaphorical ‘measuring bar’ as a set of socially constructed racial and cultural norms and values. Instead, the continuous reinforcement of these norms at home, in school, and by society fostered within me an unconscious perception of them as racially and culturally neutral; they were simply the ‘right’ way to live one’s life. The emphasis placed upon these norms and values served to position them in order of significance. For example, despite my academic struggles, teachers often described me as polite, kind, and respectful. The embodiment of these qualities proved largely irrelevant as the locus of emphasis was placed on academic success. These qualities were associated with the norm and therefore were not celebrated. My presumption that there existed a ‘correct’ way of living would later impact my teacher identity upon entering a foreign culture when I moved to Hawai‘i.

I carried these feelings of inadequacy into my first year of teaching, where I negotiated these negative identity markers with the qualities that society expected out of ‘good’ educators. These seemed to be the opposite what I embodied: intelligent, selfless, caring, brave, and supportive. In line with a sociocultural view of identity which considers that people are products of their social histories, I now understand that my lack of awareness pertaining to counter-narratives of the dominant cultural discourse about what constituted ‘good’ teaching and professionalism is directly correlated to the construction of teacher identity that I considered to be coherent with my own self-understanding. Alsup (2006) points out that early career teacher

identities are shaped by the values and norms of other people and of the institutions in which they teach. It becomes apparent that a weak sense of personal identity left little in the way of values and beliefs to fall back upon when faced with conflict in the form of institutional and interpersonal challenges to various aspects of my developing teacher identity. If I had possessed a critical consciousness prior to this first year of teaching, I would have been aware that the majority of the veteran teachers whom I perceived as ‘excellent’ were in fact subject to the same societal and institutional discourses as I was. These undoubtedly served to shape their perceptions of what counted as ‘good’ in school settings. As evident in my narrative, my ‘unconsciousness’, in combination with my positionality as a new teacher, provided for little in the way of a sense of agency.

Predictably, I almost always conceded to the powers that be despite the professional judgements that I had developed as a result of my ongoing teaching experience. These judgments, I found, sometimes sharply contrasted with the commonly accepted norms, practices, and policies that characterized the outcomes based accountability environment of the school. It became apparent that product-oriented culture that framed ‘good’ teaching and learning served to alienate those students who did not ‘measure up’ to the bar. As I became better-oriented, the significance of building trusting relationships with students was also revealed. I began viewing my students through a more holistic lens while gradually learning the value of a process-oriented pedagogy.

Ultimately, my self-perception as an inadequate educator manifested into a fear of being exposed as such through classroom observations and high-stakes testing measures. The contested nature of the field highlights the need for novice teachers to understand and recognize their

position within it. Danaher (2002) conceptualizes “misrecognition” as one of the consequences of not fully understanding *how* we operate within the field.

In sum, my assertions of teacher identity had at times conflicted with the embedded values of institutional and contextual setting. I conceded to these values, despite my professional judgement, and was ultimately rewarded with institutional capital that included a quality teacher evaluation, the procurement of a lifetime teaching license, and an offer of employment for the following school year. All of these served as forms of institutional reinforcement of the invisible ‘measuring bar’ which privileges White middle class-ness. Important of note is the power that the invisible norm held over my perceptions. Although I had become conscious of and saw value in counter-narratives to the norm, its association with career success through the procurement of various forms of institutional capital served to reinforce my perception of it as the ‘correct’ way.

Critical reflection concerning the power held over me by the implicit cultural norms of my upbringing led to the subsequent investigation of my own White racialization. As I gained experienced as an educator in public, private, and charter school settings in Hawai‘i, my teacher identity evolved as a result of various factors that influenced my personal and professional development. While I had not yet attained a critical consciousness, I did gain new perspectives on consistent basis. In particular, lived experiences resulting from my positionality as “cultural outsider” in Hawai‘i led to the self-recognition of my White racial identity. This proved both destabilizing and frightening due to the deeply internalized, largely unconscious sense of racial belonging that most White people enjoy in American society. DiAngelo (2011) identifies the root of Whites’ sense of racial belonging as culture at large, noting:

Everywhere we look, we see our own racial image reflected back to us – in our heroes and heroines, in standards of beauty, in our

role-models and teachers, in our textbooks and historical memory, in the media, in religious iconography including the image of god himself, etc. In virtually any situation or image deemed valuable in dominant society, Whites belong. (p. 62)

The centrality of Whiteness explains why a sense of racial belonging is often taken for granted by White people. This centrality also promotes a deeply embedded assumption of racial superiority: we are better, more capable, and more important than people of color. While knowledge of my class position aids in locating the deeply embedded assumptions of what constitutes 'good', an awareness of my White racialization reveals my resistance to perceiving the dominant values and norms that function in Hawai'i as legitimate. During this time period, knowledge of my racial identity, and subsequently my positionality within the context of Hawai'i, served to foster a continuous process of negotiating my values and beliefs with that of 'local'. Although confusion about the association between class position and economic status would ultimately impact my teacher identity, I gradually began the process of negotiating those beliefs and values that I was consciously aware of. Today, I would describe the motivations driving this process of ongoing negotiation as selfish in nature. The dominant values of my White, middle-class upbringing were still taken for granted and thus viewed as superior to all others. I perceived each negotiation as an act of social and/or economic survival. These negotiations typically occurred as the result of conflict in a specific area of my personal or professional life. Although I truly believed that I was assimilating to 'local' culture, the conflict that I experienced internally demonstrates not a reluctance to change, but instead an inability to do so.

These unconscious notions were reinforced by the outcomes based accountability environments that characterized teaching and learning within the Hawai‘i’s public schools. This demonstrated to me that the purpose and goals of schooling in Hawai‘i were the same as in New Jersey. The difference between the two contexts, it appeared, resided in what the schools and students in Hawai‘i *lacked*. The act of comparing these contexts led to my adoption of a deficit view of public education in Hawai‘i. Public schools here, I observed, lacked numerous ‘comforts’ that were standard in New Jersey: air conditioning, a clean and insect-free classroom, educational resources, manageable class sizes, working desks, etc. Students, I observed, were in general not as ‘good’ at the various aspects of schooling – be it academic ability, disposition, behavior, career goals, etc. - in comparison to those whom I had taught in New Jersey. In sum, the product-oriented focus that characterized both institutional contexts served to reinforce the taken-for-granted assumptions that resulted from my racial and cultural upbringing because it opened the door to comparison. As a result, I assumed that it would be much more difficult to achieve the desired institutional outcomes within the context of a public school setting in Hawai‘i. The insight pertained through critical reflection has disrupted my former thinking patterns, revealing that schools have particular cultures and are places where multiple cultures are fused. Just as students do not enter school as empty vessels waiting to be “filled,” teachers, too, come with past experiences, ideologies, and cultures of their own (Freire, 1999). However, cultural practices are not neutral; they are full of values about what is meaningful, appropriate, and natural to the identity of the particular community (Miller & Goodnow, 1995).

The perception described above also served to reinforce my perceptions of both teacher autonomy (valued) and high-stakes testing (not valued), which became cemented in my consciousness as paramount to my success as an educator. The realities confronted in the attempt

to meet similar product-oriented institutional expectations within the context of a public school in Hawai‘i exposed me to new dimensions of teaching and learning. As a “dominant culture teacher”, I tended to assume “that decisions about what is important for students to know and how it can best be taught are culturally neutral issues and that there are generic principles of good teaching that apply regardless of cultural context” (Jenks, Lee & Kanpol, 2001, p. 88). However, living and working within the dominant cultural framework of Hawai‘i, yet being held to similar institutional expectations as New Jersey, would eventually lead to a recognition on my behalf of the unearned privilege of people in the mainstream. During this specific time period, though, the majority of my immediate perceptions were focused upon pedagogy; a stark contrast from the content-oriented approach that I had come to learn in New Jersey. My shift in focus to engaging students was the result of the variables that made teaching so challenging in Hawai‘i. Classroom observations offered but a brief, one-dimensional snapshot of my abilities as an educator.

Over time, many the ‘local’ values and beliefs that I adopted as a result of the ongoing negotiation became normalized. The context of Hawai‘i served to color the all aspects of the educational system, and the classroom implications resultantly shifted some of my taken-for-granted assumptions about professionalism. The larger cultural value of placing relationships over individual achievement served to promote the cultivation of meaningful relationships between students and myself. I developed an authentic sense of empathy for the many students who struggled to meet the academic demands of public schooling. I related to them because of a self-awareness pertaining to my own struggles as an adolescent, which in turn spurred an ongoing process of self-reflection about what constituted ‘good’ pedagogy. Slowly, my philosophy of education shifted towards honoring the holistic process of learning. This

contradicted the ‘win at all costs’, individualistic mentality so deeply embedded within the dominant, middle-class culture in New Jersey. I began to resent implications that the multitude of state-mandated standards had on teaching and learning. While it is certainly true that a clearly defined sense of professional self is no guarantee of quality, I prided myself on being a reflective educator who closely monitored his students’ progress and was not averse to modifying his approach when presented with something better.

In sum, I trusted my training, experience, and knowledge of my students, and it often felt like, by adhering too closely to the standards, I was being asked to *discount* those things. The reality presented by the sheer difference of abilities possessed by the students in my classes did not lend well to the product-oriented culture. In my mind, I had a choice: Adhere to standards by teaching mostly irrelevant academic content at an intense pace – with the probability of alienating many students who were skills deficient through summative assessments - or explore specific content areas in depth, establishing meaningful connections to the lives of students while promoting a class-culture of growth through the formative nature of project based learning.

It is within this metaphorical space – where a philosophy of education is *shared* by educator and institution alike – that I have come to more fully understand my experience of teacher burnout. Due to my perception of what such an alignment *meant*, any negative emotions that I experienced while in this role were to a significant extent not addressed - much less worked through. I misrepresented these emotions as a personal issue. They were a challenge to overcome as the result of my own personal and/or professional inadequacies. Occasionally, I would call home for advice only to hang up feeling guilty and ashamed after being told stories about how ‘so and so’ manages his or her teaching job with a family, children, etc. I was inadequate in comparison, I thought.

The problem of teachers' negative emotions is often studied in relation to burnout, vulnerability and resilience (Gu & Day, 2010; Kelchtermans, 2005). Although teachers talk about emotional stress and de-motivation towards their profession, they experience a tension because they cannot fully express negative feelings against their "clients", the pupils. The concept of teacher's burnout has been more recently replaced by the idea of teachers' professional vulnerability (Kelchtermans, 1996, 2005) which is related to experiences of feeling threatened and questioned by principal, parents, and politicians and being unable to face the growing demand for change and innovation. Clearly, teaching today is demanding job which requires strong resilience abilities in order to successfully navigate such vulnerability and change.

A shift in focus from teacher stress and burnout to *resilience* provides me with knowledge about the ways that teachers manage and sustain their motivation and commitment in times of change. In general, resilience is understood as an ability to quickly and efficiently recovering strengths and spirit in the face of adversity. In this sense, I considered myself to be a highly resilient person during the time-period which encompassed this critical incident. However, my limited understanding of the concept in this singular sense most likely led to the cultivation of an exaggerated sense of possession of resilience on my behalf. After all, my path to a private school setting had been quite arduous – yet there I was. I lacked an adequate knowledge about resilience as a multidimensional, socially constructed, and dynamic concept. In this regard, my lack of knowledge about how resilience functions with respect to teacher identity and teacher burnout can be directly attributed to my failure to successfully navigate the growing crisis which led to my ultimate departure.

According to Gu and Day (2010), resilience is closely allied to a strong sense of vocation, self-efficacy and motivation to teach, which are fundamental for promoting achievement in all aspects of students' lives. Rudow (1999) asserts that the teachers subject to burnout are those are involved, devoted, and conscientious. Why, then, did I not experience burnout while serving in previous educational contexts? In my opinion, I have embodied the identified characteristics over the course of my career - not only while serving as a teacher at Offshore Academy. Tateo (2012) sheds light on this mystery, explaining that teachers' resilience has a social dimension involving the interactive impact of personal, professional and situated factors on teacher identity. This means that a teacher can show resilience in a specific context or professional phase of his or her career, but might display similar abilities if the context changes. Rudow (1999) provides further illumination, arguing that "helper motives", as opposed to "pedagogical or subject-oriented motives" (p. 55), tend to dominate in teachers who are most susceptible to burnout. Helper-motives represent high expectations that realistically cannot be filled: learning motivation, discipline, and gratitude. As such, the critical reflection continues as I explore these constructs.

While knowledge of resilience in the context of teacher identity and educational reform is helpful to educators who must navigate within the system, it is important to also shine the spotlight on the system itself as fundamentally flawed. Neoliberal educational reform measures share a common emphasis on ensuring equity through measures aimed to closing the achievement gap. Yet the understanding of 'equity' through which these measures extend from is faulty. It is faulty due to the emphasis it instills on viewing all students as equal; all held to common standards of what is 'good', 'best', etc. Taken together, the educational reality in Hawai'i's public schools is one in which a multitude of inequalities - cultural inequity, staffing inequity, instructional inequity, socioeconomic inequity – blended together to reinforce an

‘opportunity gap’. This term refers to inputs – the unequal and inequitable distribution of resources and opportunities to prepare teachers and students alike for the realities of working in a public school classroom here.

In total, I was unable to come to any sort of definitive conclusion right away at this stage in my autoethnographic inquiry – although I would later. In line with the emergent nature of this inquiry, there was still much to be uncovered regarding the impacts of the personal dimension of my identity. The learning which resulted from continuous acts of critical reflection across all of the critical incidents storied here transformed the perspectives attained from each time and time again. I encourage the reader to embrace the uncertainty which characterizes the non-linear, messy nature of studying human experience. The heightened sense of personal agency that I have attained from the ongoing process of constructing and reconstructing an authentic sense of self serves as a support in itself for both navigating the sea of dominant discourses and coping with the increasing demands and constant changes which exemplify the teaching profession in an era of educational reform.

Vignette 3: “The Incessant Conversation”

“Are you ready, Jen?”

I shout my question loud enough in the hopes that my voice transcends the dim hallway where I am standing. I have just finished distributing a number of reminders in teachers’ mailboxes, which are located here.

“We are going to be late for the organization-wide meeting!”

I would not shout if anyone else were present in the program office next door, which houses the lead administrators of our summer program. But it’s 3:45 PM, and I know where all of the remaining members of our program are. The majority of the lead teachers left at 1 PM after eating lunch with their scholars. Those who teach the electives after lunch had all left campus by 3 PM. One of our administrators is in a logistics meeting on the other side of this sprawling campus. Securing transportation to and from the program for our students is not an issue; although they come from all sides of this island, we have seemingly unlimited finances at our disposal. The meeting is instead aimed at refining our program’s community engagement strategy; we need to make sure that the students consistently wake up early enough to catch the buses that we send for them. How can we get them *on* the bus?

Meanwhile, the lead administrator is treating a group of potential donors to coffee on the second-floor balcony of the faculty cafeteria. I cannot think about the program donors without becoming inspired. *I’ve seen their last names affixed to many of the buildings in educational settings here in Hawai‘i.* In truth, I do not fully comprehend this brand of altruism; the ‘financial’ brand. Teachers, it seems, promote a much different brand of altruism... a ‘time and effort’ brand. However, the dominant discourse of society colors the teaching profession in a hue which the naked eye cannot separate from altruism; it is an *expectation*.

This is new role for me. I spent part of the morning with these same donors. Instead of planning lessons or instructing classes, I was tasked with providing them with a tour of the program. I wore pressed slacks, dress shoes and an aloha shirt instead of the shorts and Vans sneakers which I commonly wore in public school settings here. Students and teachers alike take pride in their appearance each day. As the donors and I walked all across the sprawling, manicured campus, I provided information about specific aspects of the program between intermittent classroom visits. The donors seemed to enjoy interacting with both students and teachers alike. I could not help but imagine how organic this all seemed.

The experience had unfolded exactly the way I had intended when planning all of the aspects and details a week prior. The information that I provided and the classroom visits were all methodologically scheduled. The teachers that we visited were given notice days in advance, which provided them adequate time to prepare their students to represent the program to the best of their ability. It feels artificial. And it is. What was observed in each classroom was produced by humans. It always is. But it is within the artificial structure of learning activities that natural phenomena flourish. Students learn to communicate effectively, to be patient, to be open-minded, to think critically.

Artificial, yes. But my efforts were not insincere. I had learned how to showcase the various divisions and elements of our program in a specific time-frame. Further, I have discovered a newfound passion – as well as a natural ability - for the art of ‘selling’. *My father, the salesman, has seemingly rubbed off on me.* Painting our program in the best possible light is a form of supporting students; a different avenue then I have become accustomed to as a classroom teacher but none-the-less fulfilling.

And this was but one of many hats I wear each day.

I design grade level program evaluations. I interpret and enforce the student discipline code on a case by case basis. I find myself navigating all across the campus each day. This has provided me with a great perspective on teaching, learning, and the school culture as a whole.

I feel proud this summer. In four years, I have evolved from the young man who did not know a single soul in Hawai‘i; who had to beg, promise, and plead his way into part-time employment at a charter school. I have put in the hard work every day since. I have grown personally and professionally. And here I am. I have worked my way into a position where leaders are accessible.

I am proud that this independent school *setting* is accessible. This context leaves me feeling overwhelmed at times. I deem this phenomena *sibling feelings*.

Overjoyed. Hopeful. Insignificant. Grateful. Anxious.

Like siblings, they contradict one another at times. Yet all are part of an internalization which I know to be true. These feelings are natural to my positionality. Whether I like them or not, they currently belong together.

I often wonder if I am good enough to be a private school teacher in a setting such as this one.

A sense of defensiveness immediately comes over me: *you have the ability to succeed anywhere.* I believe it but why am I still *uneasy*?

Why I am still intimidated? What else does this institution represent - and to whom?

My uneasiness stems from a hidden sense of fear whose core is located deeper inside than I am willing to explore. The people who collectively make up this institution are friendly, passionate, dedicated, respectful, knowledgeable, and imaginative. I admire these characteristics; I have attempted to embody these for years upon years. Somedays, I am confident that these are the qualities which represent the core of my identity. On these days, I am hopeful.

However, there are days when these same qualities seem foreign to my life. I ‘embody’ these qualities each morning in the quiet, predawn darkness of my apartment. I am alone and in tune with my intention. *What will I do to become to best version of myself today?* Some of the

most significant decisions of my life have all been cultivated during this time. For example, the decision pursue a doctorate in order to become more knowledgeable about teaching and learning was pondered during this time-period over the course of many weeks.

It is the rest of the day – the multiple contexts I live and work within; the characters who inhabit these contexts... sometimes the experiences and interactions which encompass the *rest* of my day remind me of an internal dilemma I wish to ignore. Sometimes I have to knowingly *reject* what I believe to be true, such as Cooley’s “looking glass self” theory of identity. This notion assumes a person’s conception of ‘self’ grows out of society’s interpersonal interactions and the perceptions of others.

Why? Because those contexts, characters, and interactions I mention above. They all seem to work together to remind me that I am not familiar with the friendly, passionate, dedicated, respectful, knowledgeable, etc. My experiences as a public school teacher in Hawai‘i can be summed up best as “messy”. Success, failure, achievement, disappointment... they are all taxing to the very core. Calling family in the mainland reinforces an internalization of the private school qualities as ultimately unsustainable. I will not disclose to others here in Hawai‘i what I have had to unlearn and overcome just to function efficiently as an educator. The deep-seeded fear I mentioned previously stems from the uncertainty of not knowing if I will ultimately overcome what I both know and do not know to be embodied.

This institution occupies a privileged position in society. A significant portion of the faculty members I have met are also graduates of this school. On multiple occasions over the course of the last few years, I have been told that I ‘look the part’. Apparently, aspects of my identity appearance (physical appearance, clothing, profession, goals) have been interpreted in a manner which suggests to others that I am of a certain class-positioning imbued with a certain privilege.

Maybe I look the part in my Reyn Spooner shirt. But my local girlfriend bought me this shirt as a gift. She has taught me how to dress ‘appropriately’ in Hawai‘i. Her family has been gracious enough to ‘hand-me-down’ many others as well. *Maybe I look the part because I am tall and White.* This institution has a reputation for historically catering to a primarily White student population of elite class-positioning due to significant economic means. But being tall and White did not prevent emotional abuse as a child, nor did it confer elite forms of capital upon my lower middle-class family. I imagine a ‘private school’ version of my upbringing in which the qualities I value - kindness, dedication, respectfulness, knowledge, and imagination - are continuously reinforced at school and at home. Instead, I learned how to function - better yet, how to *survive* – environments filled with threats, punishments, guilt-tripping, manipulation, and blame. *Maybe I fit the mold because of my pursuit of an advanced degree.* If I could only explain how embarrassingly ‘blind’ I was upon entering the program. My classmates had interests, goals, purposes, and visions – valid reasons to engage in the prolonged, strenuous course of study. And me? Why was I there? *I just wanted to be a better teacher.* I was not learning as much as I wanted through professional development activities. This seemed like a logical ‘Option B’.

But ‘blending in’ here is overwhelmingly positive in nature – it is a label I willingly accept. I often wonder how my association with this institution influences the expectations I

place upon myself. Further, I am curious about the nature of these expectations. Are they positive in that I am able to envision new possibilities with regards to my own growth and abilities? Or, are they driven by the stubborn subconscious insecurities which at times demand I overachieve.

One thing is for certain: society's perception of a teacher seems to transform when that teacher is associated with this particular institution. Teachers here are treated as consummate professionals. This resonates deeply with me. It has spurred an awareness of the correlation which exists between teaching in the context of Hawai'i's public school system and *mediocracy*. The daily realities of my lived experiences, both personally and professionally, have served to reinforce this perception: low salaries, poor working conditions, cultural disparities between students and teachers, disappointing student-learning outcomes, unflattering perceptions of the profession help by friends and partners – and their misguided expectations, etc.

At first, the validation I had received from others – mostly from professional fields outside of education - felt incredible. And to think, teachers here are paid more, enjoy state of the art facilities, have autonomy in their pedagogy, and share a similar level of cultural capital with the student population... I have given my best effort in this role through the summer, yet I feel refreshed each day. The professionals... you know, the individuals who have only recently come to discover my 'value' after this shift in contexts... those to whom I had suddenly become visible. They cannot possibly understand the blend of mental, physical, and emotional exhaustion that is teaching in the overcrowded and underfunded public school system.

I want to label these people as *shallow*. I really do. Primarily of East-Asian descent, those in this camp are privileged, actually, many are incredible people. In fact, I am guilty of making the very same error as well. In the past, I have (often subconsciously) fallen victim to equating an individual's value with their level of income. We are *all* affected by the early, often, and continuous nature of the socialization process which serves to reinforce the values of our capitalist society. Throughout my career, I have listened to individuals both inside and outside of the profession speak about our field with the predicate that *everyone knows* teachers do not go into teaching for the money. These people paint teachers as 'do-gooders' and sell the profession similar to that of a missionary's line of work. This sentiment has never sat well with me.

The social norm by which educators are not supposed to express concern about their value marginalizes the profession as a whole. Why should I be immune to the choices and incentives that drive the decision-making of all other members of society? Yet it is difficult to untangle doing a job just for the money and being influenced in one's professional choices by money.

The value which I see in this institution is anything but shallow. It is rooted in a genuine and authentic purpose which has framed much of the direction pertaining to my adult life. This context presents me with the greatest opportunity to grow personally and professionally. I refuse to feel selfish for possessing such a goal. I have *functioned within dysfunction* for too long. I have had enough of working for others who only desire to consume. I have willingly pushed myself through the devastating, painful, uncertain, and often isolated process of healing from those who abuse.

I deserve to function within an institutional culture that *offers* as much as it *takes*.

The predawn hours take on a new meaning.

Initial Analysis

The question above provides the initial direction for this analysis. An investigation into the motivations that drove my desire to seek employment within Hawai‘i’s private school arena reveals the impacts of race, ethnicity, and class on the taken-for-granted assumptions that served to inform my perception of what constitutes various forms of ‘good’. Subsequently, an interrogation of these impacts highlights the broader historical, cultural, social, and political forces that bear upon and shape identity, promoting a sense contextual awareness.

I began this process through the construction a descriptive written narrative for the purpose of identifying and challenging my assumptions – the beliefs, values, cultural practices, and social structures which shape my worldview – in order to assess their impact on what I had originally deemed as a “logical” decision. Below is a brief overview of my positionality during the immediate period of time leading up my decision:

- I had recently earned tenure within the Hawai‘i Department of Education as the result of completing two years of “satisfactory” teaching at a public high school.
- I had recently completed my first year as a doctoral student at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa.
- I was hired by an elite private school to serve in a summer school teaching position.

At first glance, one might reasonably infer that the events identified above represent milestones. This marked the first time in my career that I had attained tenure in an educational system. I had finally achieved a sense of stability and security. Yet I was unsatisfied with various aspects of my status. My time serving within the Hawai‘i Department of Education was marked by consecutive 5-percent pay cuts resulting from cost saving measures introduced by state legislature had diminished (Kalani, 2011). Taken together with the fact that Hawai‘i’s teacher

salaries, when adjusted for cost-of-living, are the lowest in the nation, a sense of uncertainty hovered over various aspects of my being. This proved overwhelming at times. Tuition payments, my girlfriend, rent, car insurance, groceries... I found it ironic that I had worked so diligently to secure a job that seemingly bound me to a “sub-par” lifestyle.

“No”, I thought, “There will be no celebration”.

Tenure was not freedom. Tenure represented the chains which bound me to the “average”. These chains created distance between what I was and what I could be.

What “could I be”? I did not have a response to the question, but I *knew* that it involved more in the way of compensation. I looked forward to beginning my service at the elite private school in a new role. The previous summer saw me serving in a unique leadership role through which I was exposed to new perspectives of education that opened my mind to future possibilities. A seed was planted. This summer, I would learn first-hand of the realities that color teaching and learning in a private school setting. My learning as a doctoral student, as I perceived it, converted into institutional currency. I did not enter the doctoral program for this purpose.

“No”, I firmly told myself, “I adopted this course of study to improve my practice on behalf of my current and future students”.

This was true.

Seriously. I possess more flaws than one can count. But my decision was one with the intentions of others in mind.

Regardless, I was pleased to learn how the currency I attained as doctoral student seemed to add to my overall ‘value’ as an educator. After all, it had directly contributed to my selection by this private school a year ago. Once I had my foot in the door, I let my work ethic take over.

Getting one's foot in the door of a prestigious private school in Hawai'i is no simple matter. In a sense, it appeared as if my status as a doctoral student served to cover up the name of the 'average' university that sat atop both my undergraduate and graduate degrees. I would make sense of this later.

Critical reflection not only reveals the underlying motivations for my decision, but also ignites a process that moves the focus far beyond the 'walls' that encapsulate my narrative. I have come to learn that my decision to teach in a private school was based less upon an economic basis than my logic had originally suggested. Instead, this decision was a result of the many dimensions of an evolving teacher identity. I had 'tried on' a private school teacher identity that summer, much like an outfit. This identity seemed to 'fit' me like a glove. I was exposed to a holistic model of teaching and learning that resonated with my own values. In this setting, I was encouraged to cultivate my own vision of social studies education and subsequently was provided with full autonomy and access to unlimited resources in order to support the realization of that vision. My students were well-behaved and class sizes were manageable.

And the faculty! They were collaborative, highly skilled, and passionate about both personal and professional growth. More remarkable, they appeared to be genuinely happy.

I am alone in the dressing room, staring in the mirror. This new outfit looks fantastic. I wear it well. This outfit, in the form of a private school teacher identity, represented something much more significant. This was an identity marker that I perceived as superior to all of the others I had 'worn' in the past. Ultimately, though, the time arrives when one must wear their new outfit in public for all to see. This complicates matters. Displaying a new image to the world proves to be an uncomfortable experience. After all, it's just an outfit, right? How does one truly know that he/she embodies the qualities represented by this new image? How does one go about properly asserting their new image? Will those who already know the individual reject his/her new image? Will they see past the veneer of clothing and expose this individual for who he or she really is?

I use the analogy above to evoke in readers an awareness of my own self-perception during this time period. Although the aspects of teaching and learning within the private school setting resonated strongly with my own beliefs and values, I was hesitant to fully assert this identity. My professional socialization, which Austin (2002) defines as “a process through which an individual becomes part of a group, organization, or community” (p. 95), was characterized by daily realities that I believed the majority of these teachers and administrators could not adequately comprehend. The goal of professional socialization is to “instill the values, behaviors, and norms of the profession that are essential for the survival of that profession” (Utley-Smith, Phillips, & Turner, 2007, p. 425).

Survival? “Oh” I thought sarcastically, “I have learned how to *survive* alright”.

Alsop (2006) points out that early career teacher identities are shaped by the values and norms of other people. My unique experiences within a number of school settings had embedded within me with a jaded perspective on the profession despite what I saw each day. Survival took on many forms; it was avoiding phone calls from members of the media who are probing for information about an administrator’s inappropriate use of school finances; it was signing an agreement created by a school principal which stipulates that you will never again address mental health topics in a social studies class; it was becoming uncomfortably accustomed to the yelling and name-calling that characterized interaction between teachers and administrators during weekly faculty meetings; it was holding my ground and withstanding bullying from veteran teachers who were supposed to mentor me during a fateful first year of teaching; it was even dodging the desk that has been hurled in my direction by a student who had suddenly discovered a reason for conflict in my racial identity. “F**** haole!”

As a result of my professional socialization, a fear existed deep inside of me. Would I be capable of adopting and sustaining a private school teacher identity? I tried to ignore or all out block the feelings that proved to be in direct contrast to this identity. It was the consistent sense of resentment that I despised the most--the Ivy League degrees, upper-class backgrounds, paid-sabbaticals, and the regular sense of satisfaction. I had begun to victimize myself. Was I strong enough to shield my personal values and beliefs about professionalism and education against the destructive forces of my working environments?

I convinced myself that yes, I was. My experience over the course of six weeks spent in this private school context had contrasted much of which I had accepted as 'truth'. Clearly, this had to be an anomaly. It was an absolute joy to be here each day. Still, I wondered if my fondness stemmed from a comparison to other work environments or a correlation to an identity I could not fully grasp.

Critical Catalyst

I dreaded the end of lunch time. When the bell rang, I would walk down the hallway alone. The rest of my second grade classmates went in the opposite direction, back to Ms. Macalwaine's classroom. I was not in trouble, but I was also not allowed join my friends in our classroom. To a second grader, this situation was uncomfortable and unsettling, much like the concept of trouble itself.

I pretended to forget about my post-lunch duty the day before. "It *almost* worked," I told myself, injecting false-hope into my consciousness. Silently slipping past Ms. Macalwaine's gaze, I had blended in with the rest of my classmates as they funneled through the narrow classroom door after lunch. I obediently took out my reading workbook and a pencil before any of the other students; before class even started.

“Okay class” Ms. Macalwaine began, “Please turn to page 52 in the workbook and then...”

I had stopped paying attention after hearing “page 52”. I opened my workbook and began flipping through the pages. I was always afraid of being left behind and tried to get ‘head starts’ whenever possible. The earnest effort I had put forth to meet these directives left me unaware of Ms. Macalwaine’s gaze, which had shifted directly on to me.

“Nicholas”, she stated gruffly.

I looked up, meeting Ms. Macalwaine’s eyes with my own. “*Just let me stay here*”, I thought intensely to myself.

In an orotund voice, she announced “You are *supposed* to be with the speech teacher right now”.

Petrified that Ms. Macalwaine’s had just told all of my classmates the reason why I had to leave them each day after eating lunch, I could do nothing but stare blankly ahead as the tears began to build around my eyes. I did not have *a* speech impediment; no, the multiple impediments I encountered on a daily basis formed what the school’s speech pathologist had told my parents as a speech disorder. I was insecure and shy to a fault; any prolonged attention was assured to be accompanied by intense anxiety and withdrawal.

Ms. Macalwaine has interpreted my lack of action as an act of defiance. “What are YOU still doing here?” The tone in her voice tells me that this is a command, not a question. I try to respond, to apologize. Everyone in class is staring at me because Ms. Macalwaine has stopped her entire lesson.

“I... I... I... I... I... I’m s-s-s-s-s sowwwy M-M-M-Ms. Macalwaine”

“Take your speech workbook and make your way outside to the trailer immediately,” Ms. Macalwaine’s followed, before delving back into her original lesson. I kept my head down while pretending to jog out of the room in the effort to hide the tears that had filled my eyes.

I didn’t have a stutter, or even a *severe* stutter as the speech pathologist diagnosed it. According to my mother and father, I had a *stuttering problem*. The speech pathologist identified my stutter as the most significant element of my larger speech disorder. It manifested into other speech delays, such as extreme difficulty pronouncing fricatives (the long sounds that require continued air-flow) correctly.

In particular, I dreaded “*th*” fricatives most of all.

“Tin”. The speech lady was looking directly at me from her seat across the small table in her trailer.

“Tin!” I repeated dutifully.

“Good!” she exclaimed. Speech lessons consisted of me repeating words and receiving little toy erasers or scratch and sniff stickers when I succeeded. I would always try to win enough of them to share with my friends in class each afternoon.

“*TH-in*”, came next. She emphasized the “*th*” fricative by exaggerating the motion of her tongue to its position directly underneath her front teeth.

My chest tightens. My face becomes hot. Breath becomes forced labor instead of an unconscious occurrence. Taken together, these elements represent a communication stress that informs my (lack of) participation in school settings.

“*Ti-hin*” I respond meekly. And we begin over and over again.

In addition to the forty-five minutes of speech therapy that I received at school each day, my parents hired a *stuttering lady* (as they referred to her) to reinforce my skills at home. At the

onset of our first session, I locked myself in a bedroom upstairs, refusing to participate in the process. From a Piagetian perspective of cognitive development, the association between my parents' embodied anxiousness and my 'stuttering problem' was interpreted through a literal, concrete-operational lens – something that I did made their life worse. Not stuttering, I assumed, would lead to their happiness. I was not *supposed* to stutter. When faced with emotional pressure, such as that of which had resulted from this consciousness, I could be counted on to withdraw... to run away from the conflict in order to meet my basic need for safety.

My brother and I had plowed directly through the cheap, hollow wood doors of our house many times in the past. Sometimes we were playing, other times we were fighting. It does not matter. I was determined to take any measure necessary to keep the “stuttering lady” away from me. Behind the locked door and inside of my bedroom, I was safe. My parents would not have to argue that evening because there would be nothing to talk about.

“*God is gonna' punish you!*” my mother shouted through the flimsy door separating us. She must be really serious. My mother *knew* that this particular phrase would cut right through me... it *always* did. This phrase represented the proverbial card up her sleeve, an action taken only when the situation was critical. I sense that she feels poorly about using this, as if each time I hear it a small piece of me disappears forever.

Our family identified with the Roman Catholic religion. Beginning in the first grade, my brother and I were forced into attending a one-hour religious education program called “CCD”. This took place at our church every Tuesday night, and my mother had made a compromise with us in order to get us to attend ‘peacefully’. We did not have to go to church on Sundays and we got to go to my favorite restaurant in the entire world after CCD: Pizza Hut. Most of the kids from my neighborhood were also Catholic and endured a similar fate, but as far as I knew they

attended a different church and did not go to Pizza Hut afterwards. For the majority of us, formal Catholic education was curtailed after the eighth grade upon the completion of the Sacrament of Confirmation, which can be generally understood as a Catholic rite of passage representing both a recognition of one's spiritual growth from childhood to the burgeoning advent of adulthood, as well as a commitment to honor the teachings of the church in the future. My second-grade self had already made an important decision regarding my post-Confirmation plans: I would continue to dine at Pizza Hut each week but would most likely never step foot in the church again.

"God is gonna' punish you, Nick!" Some of you reading this narrative might perceive my mother's sentiment as illogical, perhaps even contextually irrelevant. I did not enjoy church, so it seems unlikely that God would be enough of a motivating factor for me to open that door. In truth, she might have gotten a quicker reaction by promising an additional night at Pizza Hut. But I was being especially stubborn and she knew that the time had arrived to shift the balance of power in her favor, even if that meant exploiting a weakness. It was time for manipulation.

While my mother and I were both aware that the phrase she had shouted was not intended to be taken literally, its purpose was located in a similar vein. *"God is gonna' punish you!"* is the equivalent of an instrument used to inflict pain. It represented the larger phenomena that of "Catholic Guilt", a term which describes the feelings of remorse, shame, and/or conflict in people who are or were raised Catholic. Although many people view the term as a joke or cliché, for many of us who grew up in the church it has proven to be an inescapable burden that carries lifelong percussions. In the Catholic faith, we are typically given very clear messages about which types of behavior are acceptable and which are not (e.g. good vs. evil, light vs. darkness, heaven vs. hell). However, the Catholic teachings within which we are indoctrinated as children emphasize the inherent sinfulness of all people.

A certain ‘illogical logic’ results: I am a sinner. Because I am a sinner, I cannot possibly represent the positive element of the dual choices. As such, I must be the negative option.

The teachings were downright harsh most of the time: *we are unworthy; we do not deserve to be happy; we are all sinners who should constantly punish ourselves to atone for these sins*. This voice follows many Catholics to adulthood, where it is immune to rationality and Western logic.

Is it truly any surprise that a child is repeatedly told that he is unworthy, dirty, inadequate, and worthless grows into an adult who struggles with feelings of guilt and shame? One who never feels quite worthy, clean, adequate, and valuable enough?

Does it really come as any surprise that this child becomes an adult who is rarely at peace?

I am aware of the sheer irrationality of the many of the messages that I received as a child and have not attended church in over a decade, but I still pray for others each day. A friend of mine has a saying which sums up this phenomena well, arguing that as an adult, “Faith in God is optional. Catholic guilt is not.”

Despite numerous therapeutic interventions, my understanding of the nature of the grip which Catholic guilt holds on my holistic growth remains unreachable. I believe that it has contributed to the high sensitivity that characterizes my core identity as an empath. It was only very recently that I have acknowledged the excessiveness of my nurturing, giving, and feeling to others. In contrast, I find that I am willing to accept little more than emotional breadcrumbs in return from my partners. In line with the unreasonable nature of Catholic guilt, perhaps I do not feel worthy of receiving an equal amount of love despite a knowledge that suggests otherwise. Gazing outward, this feeling of inadequacy can be attributed to the attraction of narcissists who

desperately seek to soak up the copious amounts of validation that sensitive personalities are eager to provide. Ultimately, an affinity to continuously give to those who only seek to take leads to a lack of balance, self-blame, and ultimately loss.

“*God is gonna ’ punish you!*” This verbal slap which immediately knocked me down to the ground with the rest of the mere mortals. The sinner shamefully opens the door, only to receive a physical smack from his mother. After rubbing my cheek to ease the sting, the impact of the guilt trip begins to set in. *If I had worked harder, or perhaps lived more righteously, my issues would have already resolved themselves. I stutter because I am a bad person.* On an aside, I understand the logic behind my parent’s decision to raise my brother and I within the general guidelines of the Catholic Church. The teachings of this institution have also instilled within us a strong sense of self-discipline, a knowledge of morality, and the led to the development of a conscience through which we could make reasoned judgments on the moral qualities of actions. These would come in handy quite often as we navigated the various forms of “White trash” and its embodied ignorance, violence, alcoholism, and drug abuse while growing up in our working class city. I honor my mother’s wisdom, who commonly responded by stating, “We did the *best* with what we had”. I believe that she – and my family – did just that. This was their way of protecting my brother and from the pitfalls which they had experienced in their own lives. This was love: wanting better for your children than yourself.

In contrast to the viewpoint of poor behavior as the cause of my stutter, research today suggests that identifying a single factor as the cause of stuttering is nearly impossible. Genetic, environmental, and emotional factors are often believed to contribute to this speech disorder. I wonder if my parents were aware that environmental factors such as our family dynamic, fast-paced lifestyle, and levels of stress and anxiety might be exacerbating my “problem”. Ironically,

my parents often quarrel about my stutter in particular, which I perceive as placing a high value on the issue. As we have learned, these high expectations are often met by stress and anxiety. Accordingly, emotional regulation is usually miles behind my dash to withdraw from these conflicts.

I am back in Ms. Macalwaine's classroom once again. Through my second grade lens, being exposed as a stutterer in front of the entire class seemed *even worse* than my previous distinction as the first student in our grade to require eye glasses. I recall how nervous I was as our class formed a single-file line that began at the stripe of red tape on the floor of the nurse's office and snaked out the door and down the hallway. Despite my best efforts to cheat, straining to see the small letters in the bottom row of the stationary vision chart on my approach to the red tape, all that only fuzzy balls were visible. I tried to cheat once again during the test itself, squinting each eye gently as to not gain the attention of the nurse. I was the only student who left the nurses office that day with a White prescription folded into his palm to give to his parents. I had failed the school-mandated vision test.

Today, I cannot help but chuckle inside when I recall my classmate's responses to that eye test; hands were placed on my shoulder, arms wrapped all around my waist, and sympathetic sentiment flowed openly. It was as if I had a terminal disease. I remember what it felt like to be treated differently, to be given more attention than everyone else. I did not like the spotlight. This time it had been directed upon me as a result of my classmates knowledge that I was "less than", but all spotlights inevitably led to this place anyway. Being selected to answer an equation in my math group, reading a line from the class textbook in front of the class, etc. Each spotlight represented an opportunity to highlight my differences. The multiple C's that littered my first report card of the school year affirmed that I was not like the others.

It is no coincidence that my shy and insecure nature followed me through adulthood. And despite my best efforts to unlearn what had become so deeply entrenched, I have always been at risk of possessing low self-worth. Until engaging in this ongoing praxis of critical reflection, I lacked any sense of a core identity, instead choosing to focus on helping others as means of demonstrating the positive qualities, which I could never seem to internalize as my own. The personal dimension of my teacher identity (Day et al. 2006) was framed by a deficient lens from youth through adulthood. I stuttered. I attained poor grades in school. I upset my family with my behavior. I was confused as an adult. I was ‘less than’. The teachings of my religion only reinforced a belief that these deficiencies were my fault.

Applied to this vignette, such knowledge bolstered an internalized belief that I was not suited for, or deserving of a role within any private school context in Hawai‘i. Yet at the same time, I held the belief that being associated with these institutions would offer a ‘fix’ for my many deficiencies. Working in a private school context meant that I was a ‘great’ teacher – which I had correlated with being a ‘great’ person. However, at this juncture in time I was still unaware that I lacked a core sense of identity, or an understanding about how that positioned at great risk for failure. Years of hard work and achievement can be seemingly be undone in a matter of weeks by the influence of others. I needed to stand for something; more importantly, I need to *believe* that I embodied this. I needed to own an identity. It appeared that the label of private school educator in Hawai‘i would fix these issues.

Critical Analysis: Layer 1

Before we acquire great power, we must acquire wisdom to use it as well.
-Ralph Waldo Emerson

In the analysis of the previous vignette, I had attributed my perception of private schooling in Hawai‘i as being innately superior to public schooling as an ‘achieved’ notion. This

personal narrative describes a linear process of knowledge attainment that was constructed through a comparison of my experiences as a teacher in both contexts. The re-analysis of this section demonstrates an assumption of analytic primacy (Penuel & Wertsch, 1995) – that is, the employment of a starting point that directs attention to certain phenomena and away from others. In this case, I directed significant attention to the role of the *individual* to create and maintain a dynamic conception of oneself as a coherent whole (Erikson, 1964), while also skimming a selection of sociocultural elements that shape subjectivities (Vygotsky, 1978). My perspective is embedded with the assumption that I possessed a significant amount of agency, which can be understood as the capacity for intentional acts (Bandura, 1997). The storied version of my teacher burnout contradicts these findings, suggesting that I have unintentionally misrepresented the motivations that shaped my perceptions of private schooling. When taken-for-granted beliefs and assumptions are examined critically, it is possible to understand how knowledge and power shape experience.

Adopting a poststructuralist lens, which acknowledges the role of power relations within the sociocultural context in which teachers are situated, opens a space to explore my positionality beyond the situated context of schools. Pearce and Morrison (2011) clarify, contending that beyond the specific context of schools, teacher identity is also subject to social and historical practices, including discourses surrounding the teaching profession. Zembylas (2003) explains

...discourses transmit and produce power, which in turn continuously produces and constitutes the self. The discursive production of self is both liberating and constraining; discourses provide possibilities for and determine the limits of self-

understanding. Identity is understood through resistance and domination. (p. 5)

“Discourse” is used here in the poststructuralist sense of meanings constructed in relations of power. Power, according to Foucault (1978), is not a ‘top-down’ phenomena. Instead, power operates at all levels and exists alongside, and in conjunction with, resistance. Power is tied to bodies of knowledge and is inherent in discourse; defined as “the group of statements that belong to a single system of formation (Foucault, 1969, p. 121). Subjective positioning in a particular discourse will render the individual more or less powerful according to the knowledges associated with the discourse.

Foucault (1984) argues that we need to trace the constitution of the self within a historical framework of how meaning intersects with experience. He suggests that the self should be seen as both object and subject of experience; in other words, the focus of analysis of the self and one’s experiences is the discourse of experience rather than the experience itself. The experience itself does not constitute self-knowledge. It is the interrogation of the discursive place from which questions of identity are posed that trace identity as subjected to the social and historical context of practices and discourses (Bhaba, 1987). As discursive practices shift, so do identities (Britzman, 1993). Identity, through a poststructuralist lens, is formed in the shifting space where narratives of subjectivity meet the narratives of culture (Zembylas, 2003). In line with the view of the personal and professional dimensions of teacher identity that serve as a the conceptual lens for this investigation,

Shining a poststructuralist lens on the dimensions of teacher identity reveals the extent to which my assumptions and beliefs about private schooling in Hawai‘i were governed by dominant social expectations and attitudes about schooling, in addition to the negative self-

perception I had cultivated since the days of my childhood stutter. An overview of Hawai‘i’s educational culture demonstrates that private schools play an unusually significant role. Despite the lofty tuition, about 37,000 students – roughly 17 percent of all Hawai‘i students – attend private schools, compared with about 11 percent nationally (“Private School Enrollment”, 2016). Today, parents in Hawai‘i cite a variety of reasons for sending their children to private schools. These include social status, peer pressure, campus safety, higher academic expectations, highly educated teachers, smaller class sizes, and more individualized attention (Okamura, 2008; Wong, 2014). In an interview with Honolulu’s Civil Beat, Ann Bayer, the author of *Going Against the Grain: When Professionals in Hawai‘i Choose Public Schools Instead of Private Schools*, points out that “conventional wisdom” in Hawai‘i denotes that “private schools are superior to public schools” (Wong, 2014, para. 30). Orr (2004, A9; as cited in Bayer, 2009, p. 123) sums up the community-held beliefs about public and private schooling in the Hawai‘i, asserting “It does not take long for newcomers to hear over and over that if they want their child to receive a quality education in our state, they had better start checking out private schools and saving money for tuition”. This form of dominant discourse, deemed the “master narrative” by Bayer, taps into something much deeper than a perception of the quality of education.

An examination of the historical basis of the “master narrative” highlights the presence of power relations that impacted my subjective positioning. Private schools gained higher status during the missionary and plantation era of Hawaiian history when it was common practice to segregate the students of elite, often White, families from the ‘commoners’. Benham and Heck (1998, p. 35; as cited in Bayer, 2009, p. 162) note that the lingering effects of the early separate institutional structures are “powerful and continue to have a long lasting effect on the educational opportunities for particular groups of children in the state”. Lofty tuition prices characteristic of

the more selective private schools, primarily located in Honolulu, ensure that the East-Asian dominance of the social hierarchy is perpetuated.

Discourses produce rules and truths, and these become absorbed into speech, unquestioned, as though they have always been there. When discourses gain this type of momentum, they produce truths that are seemingly irrefutable and taken for granted. In Hawai‘i, the dominant discourse about education - the “master narrative” – lies hidden in plain sight. Initial acts of reflection on my behalf located the “master narrative” as sustained through word of mouth and the media alike. These examples proved easily observable due to their direct nature. Deeper reflection reveals the manner so which this dominant discourse is integrated into the fabric of society in Hawai‘i. As I became acclimated here, I observed that social introductions seemed to always begin with the question, “What school you went?” While seemingly straightforward in nature, the individual posing this question is seeking to attain information beyond the high school that you attended. Charles Djou, a local politician, explains that high school in this Hawai‘i “is the one thing that can easily and immediately identify individuals geographically, socioeconomically (and) demographically”. It can, he said, provide a sort of “instant connection” (Pape, 2014, para. 7). The implications of one’s response to this question vary by context. In my experience, this knowledge allowed other people to make assumptions about someone’s values, abilities, and life experiences. High school attended serves as a significant, if not the primary, identity marker in Hawai‘i. Current Hawai‘i Governor David Ige sums up the high school identity politics of Hawai‘i well, explaining “...where you went to college is a secondary issue for most of us. The high school you graduated from is kind of a marker of where you’re from and probably what kind of background or experience you had” (Pape, 2014, para. 16).

Such an understanding of the “master narrative” draws on the Foucauldian theory of discourse as the conjunction of power and knowledge (Foucault, 1976) and raises questions about *how* power is exercised through the perpetuation this narrative. As a manifestation of power, the dominant discourse of the “master narrative” constitutes a social reality (object) and identities (subjects). Further, discourses constitute identities that position people in potentially contradictory ways (Fairclough 1995; Gee, 1996; 1999). The “master narrative” serves as a homogenizing force, representing private schooling in a manner that privileges the voice of some groups over others. An examination of the “master narrative” through the critical lenses of race, ethnicity, and social class reveals the subjectivities that this form of dominant discourse produces and sustains.

The distribution of students attending private schools is not equal throughout the state. In the city of Honolulu - the location where I have resided exclusively since relocating to Hawai‘i nine years ago - the percentage of students attending private school increases dramatically compared to the state average of 17%. The most recent data available from the Hawai‘i Association of Independent Schools indicates that 55% of students in Honolulu attended a private school, during the 2014-2015 school year. Looking through a racial lens, Asian-Americans represent the majority of Honolulu’s total population (42.2%), followed by Whites (23.3%). Broken down by ethnicity, Honolulu’s population is distinguished as the only major metropolitan area in the United States where Japanese-Americans outnumber all others, representing roughly 20% of the city’s population. In terms of average income, the most recent American Community Survey by the U.S. Census Bureau indicates that Japanese Americans, Whites, and Chinese Americans, respectively, sit atop the hierarchy of wealth in Hawai‘i . The same ethnic groups are also positioned atop the categories of education and occupational status.

Taken together, income, education, and occupational status serve as indicators of socioeconomic status. Collectively, these findings directly correlate to the elevated level of private school attendance within the city, where the yearly tuition for the most prestigious institutions exceeds \$20,000. Further, it comes as little surprise that students who identify as Japanese American, White, and Chinese American – three ethnicities that sit at the top of the social hierarchy in Hawai‘i – are overrepresented in Hawai‘i’s private school settings (Okamura, 2008).

Much like a puzzle, a clear picture gradually emerges once these variables are taken together. The “master narrative” is a deeply embedded discourse that privileges the East-Asian and White ethnicities positioned at the apex of Hawai‘i’s social hierarchy. In contrast, this discourse serves to oppress the Native-Hawai‘i an, Filipino American, and Samoan American groups which represent the bottom rungs of Hawai‘i’s social hierarchy. Subsequently, these oppressed groups are underrepresented in private school settings. Further, this reveals why my social circle, to a large extent, consists primarily of individuals of East-Asian ethnicity. As a “transplant”, the roots of most of the friendships that I have made can be traced to the educational settings where I have worked. Although debate exists pertaining to the social positioning of educators, it remains a profession which requires post-secondary education.

At this point, I paused. Despite an accumulated knowledge of the subjectivities that are produced and sustained by the “master narrative”, I felt a sense of disconnectedness from its reach; a sense of autonomy, if you will. “After all”, I told myself, “I possess actual teaching experience in *both* contexts”. Subjectivity aside, it seemed only logical to assume that the vast majority of educators would also perceive almost all aspects of private school in Hawai‘i as superior to those of public school. Who would argue against factors that included smaller class sizes, well-behaved students who were motivated to learn, better resources and facilities, and

higher pay? These, I assumed, were perhaps just the harsh *truths* that characterize the reality of education in Hawai‘i. With my mind made up, I was convinced that I had concluded this analysis. My summation? The “master narrative” clearly perpetuates inequality, but it also carries much in the way of truth pertaining to the reality of teaching and learning in each educational context. Such inequality, I believed, did not directly impact my life nor my perception of value with regards to education. Shallow? Perhaps. My perception might have remained fixed in this position if not for the combination of a slow news day and the reckless actions of a motorist.

Creative Writing Measure: “Dominant Discourses”

The typical drive to and from my local grocery store is rather uneventful. This particular day was no different. I was almost home when the driver in front of me stopped abruptly for reasons I am still unaware of. In order to avoid this car, I have to swerve my pickup truck onto the curb, subsequently causing undercarriage damage which I became aware of when I attempted to turn on the air conditioning the next day. Nothing came out of the event.

Off to the auto repair shop I went. With time to kill, I browsed through the various news applications on my phone. Ultimately, I came upon a body of work which resonated deeply with my ongoing learning resulting from the process of autoethnographic inquiry within which I had become encapsulated.

In his *Civil Beat* article, “Stories of Inequality and Isolation”, retired University of Hawai‘i political science professor Neal Milner (2015) tells a story about an experience in his classroom for the purpose of demonstrating how dominant discourses become so deeply embedded within cultures that they are not questioned. His story resonated in such a manner that it served to transform my former perception of possessing a relative autonomy from the grip of

the “master narrative”. Milner provided his students with a newspaper clipping about a fight between two feuding family members in Waianae who were viciously battling it out in a makeshift ring set up in a parking lot that was surrounded by spectators. Although the police were present, they acted as spectators as well, enjoying themselves and watching the action. Milner notes that the general consensus amongst his students, almost none of whom had lived or spent any time on Oahu’s Leeward Coast, was of acceptance. The general attitude of the class, according to Milner, was “Let them fight. It’s their culture- the Waianae way” (para. 7) - as if Waianae was a foreign country, not a city located roughly an hour away from Honolulu. Milner’s students laughed when he asked them whether the police would act the same way if the same fight had occurred in a more affluent community such as Kahala or Kailua. According to the students, different rules applied to these communities.

Milner (2015) points out that his students’ perceptions of Waianae as a ‘bad’ place were not the result of direct experience. Instead, students’ perceptions were learned through the stories that they had heard; stories which consistently associated Waianae with violence, failure, and poverty. Expanding further, Milner highlights the actions of the police to demonstrate how stories became institutionalized into the informal rules and norms of police behavior: rules that reinforced the “Waianae way” (fighting is how to settle a dispute) of conduct (para 9). In this case, the rule that police behave differently in Waianae leads to a norm that promotes not relying on other ways of solving this particular problem. Milner sums it up well, explaining “These stories had legs. They moved from narrative to rule. They became institutionalized, simply representing the way things are” (para. 11).

Milner’s (2015) story resonates on multiple levels with my own experience. To begin, I am in many ways similar to the students in his class who were initially unable to problematize

the act of placing different expectations on individuals based upon community. In addition, these altered expectations are the result of stories that I was told. However, my experience diverges from that of Milner's students due to my positionality as an educator. This professional role has placed me in contexts where the label of 'community stakeholder' best describes the individual telling the story, as opposed to a peer. For example, I have listened to an administrator at Waianae High School paint the community in a negative light. I am well-aware that the story was shared for an explicit purpose due to my role as a summer school teacher to a number of his students. In this sense, the story was not 'freely' shared, as along with it came an expectation that I use this knowledge to inform my praxis in a manner that reflected the realities faced by these students. None-the-less, this knowledge served to reinforce the negative image that is often associated this community.

Stories take on real power when they transition to rules and subsequently are perceived to be the unquestioned natural order things. People form ideas about their identities and those of others through stories, which serve as powerful forms of discourse. In line with the view of Foucault (1970), discourses do not simply reflect or describe reality, knowledge, experience, self, social relations, social institutions, and practices; rather, they play an integral role in constituting (and being constituting by) them.

Critical Analysis: Layer 2

Applied to the "master narrative", this new perspective locates my positioning as comparable to that of the police officers described in Milner's story. Through my own understanding, police officers are expected to uphold all of the laws that frame the society in which we live. In theory, laws are 'colorblind' in that they apply equally to all of the citizens within a specific jurisdiction. In this vein, factors such as race, ethnicity, class positioning, age,

religion, income, etc. should not be acknowledged by police officers in their decision to apply the law. I cannot speak to the appropriateness of the actions of the officers detailed in the story. In sum, we learned that the actions of the police officers represented the institutionalization of an informal rule, which was directly responsible for producing and sustaining a specific norm. Rules and norms serve to reinforce expectations of this particular community, thus they can be viewed as the metaphorical ‘glue’ that help stories, or dominant discourses, ‘stick’. A connection can be established between Milner’s example of a stigma that is attached to a community and the “master narrative”, which stigmatizes most aspects of public education in Hawai‘i as inferior.

What began as critical praxis into the manner by which the master narrative impacted my sense of identity led to an exploration of educational policy, ethnicity, race, and my positionality as a ‘transplant’. To begin, my experience as a public school teacher in Hawai‘i correlates in many ways to the role of the police officers as described in Milner’s article. The article problematizes the officers’ actions of applying a Western law differently to the population largely Native-Hawaiian community. Taken more broadly, Milner takes issue with the officers’ decision to challenge the universal nature of the law itself. I know enough about the complexity of identity in Hawai‘i to know that I do not know – I *cannot* know – the extent that the police officers storied here met their obligation to uphold their core values; to ‘protect and serve’ the general public. What I can more accurately speak to, as a result of my positionality, is the extent to which Hawai‘i’s public school system honors its vision of producing “educated, healthy, and joyful lifelong learners” (Hawai‘i State Department of Education, 2015) through an adherence to a set of core values which collectively acknowledge the need for a unique approach to navigating the contextual realities of preparing island youth to meet and exceed world-class academic

standards. On paper, this appears to represent a progressive, culturally-relevant public school model.

Teaching and learning in Hawai‘i’s public schools exist within a context of what Mathison and Freeman (2003) deem the “outcomes based accountability era” of school reform. At the school level, policy measures manifest into environments that are characterized by externally formulated goals with content standards linked to a strict accountability system that is usually reliant on high-stakes testing. In particular, identifying what counts as ‘good’ within Hawai‘i’s public school classrooms proves elusive due to the lasting impacts left in the wake of various waves of neoliberal school reform. Indeed, the controversial No Child Left Behind Act (2001) – a mandatory federal policy - and subsequent Race to the Top (2010) initiative – a voluntary measure which incentivized the adoption of the Common Core State Standards by individual states - share an assumption pertaining to the logic of accountability underlying these reform efforts: schools and school personnel will not assess their performance and cannot adequately evaluate students’ learning (Manna, 2011).

From an accountability perspective, providing measures of student outcomes tied to established standards and enacting consequences for poor performance should, in theory, give schools incentives to find ways to improve, including changing teachers’ approaches to teaching (Manna, 2011). As such, when Hawai‘i was distinguished as one of the initial 12 awardees of federal grant monies through its competitive, voluntary Race to the Top initiative in 2010, many saw a reason for celebration. After all, Hawai‘i was granted a \$75 million award to be allocated towards the implementation of common standards, the development of a new teacher performance system, and efforts to align and streamline activities in communication, planning, support, and monitoring for all schools (U.S Department of Education, 2009). I readily agree

with the sentiments shared by reformers: helping the lowest-achieving students do better is of course a worthy and important aim. However, the emphasis on closing said achievement has led to education policies that have shortchanged many students by gradually narrowing the scope of schooling. I also posit that the reliance on standardized tests has stifled educational innovation. Increasingly, students' performance on standardized assessments has become tied to the evaluation of schools, principals, and teachers.

Discussing the issue from the perspective of an primary school teacher, Au (2014) explains, "The necessity of finding ways to bring all children up to standard, while raising their performance on tests, has led to the formation of a narrow discourse in many elementary schools, one that is dominated almost exclusive by issues of content delivery, productivity, and assessment" (p. 92). In line with the 'colorblind' ideology of equality in the application of law, a product-oriented culture of education, fueled by policy-driven testing measures, lends itself to a "one size fits all" approach of standardized instruction that ignores students' individual differences, needs, and cultural variations. Au describes this positionality best, arguing that policy-driven discourse "...creates an atmosphere of moral panic that limits the academic freedom of teachers" (p. 92). Au continues, highlighting that "...at its worst, it tends to predispose the role of the teacher in his students' lives to that of taskmaster, and in his own eyes, to that of a technician" (p. 92).

In this sense, I do not aim to provide a counter-narrative to the dominant policy-driven discourses that have shaped particular subjectivities which do not interact positively with the contextual realities of said school system. Instead, I position this research as a 'corrective-narrative' aimed highlighting how the embedded "policy-as-effective" discourse serves to marginalize, more so than empower, both students and teachers alike. At the policy level, this

discourse undermines the intellectual, social, aesthetic, and emotional engagement and development of students through the punitive school environments and hostile teacher-student relationships it serves to cultivate. Contemporary policy measures are impeded by contextually specific structural and cultural barriers that are largely unacknowledged as a result of the “one size fits all” approach to teaching and learning characteristic of these reforms. Ultimately, the subjectivities produced conflict with the day-to-day realities of teaching in a public school context. Ultimately, these discourses have pervaded society, where they serve to reinforce in many teachers an acceptance of Hawai‘i’s “master narrative” as objective truth.

It proves challenging to accurately describe the mental and emotional depletion which results from the reality that such discourse has shaped. The educator, primarily of Asian or White descent – whose task is increasingly informed by an externally created, one-size-fits-all policy-agenda honoring the Western, individualist position which schooling rests upon – is met by a student population dominated by those of Pacific Island cultural backgrounds. Further, this demographic, to significant extent, embodies a conflicting understanding of reality through the collectivist lens which frames their understanding of the world. The significance of understanding the sheer contrast in meaning between individualist and collectivist perceptions of knowledge transmission, decision making, individual choice and personal responsibility, progress, help seeking, and interaction styles – amongst others – has real impacts on all aspects of teaching and learning. It is unethical to expect teachers, students, and administrators to figure out, on their own, how to successfully navigate the complexity of identity in Hawai‘i.

We cannot teach what we do not know.

We are essentially set up for failure. The policy-driven measures and expected outcomes tied to our evaluations negate and/or all-together disregard the real impacts of race, ethnicity,

social-class, context and other critical factors on teaching and learning in our state. The core values which frame the Hawai‘i Department of Education’s guiding philosophy are well-intentioned but grossly insufficient. While these values acknowledge the necessity of relationship building, developing cultural-knowledge, and honoring cultural perspectives - positioning them as antecedent to meeting externally formulated standards – there exists no action plan for practitioners to implement these. Policy-driven mandates, in contrast, are meticulously detailed in design and are embedded with a multitude of guidelines for implementation and evaluation.

The contextual realities of the public school classroom in Hawai‘i stand in contrast to the very rulebook - in the form of policy-driven discourses – to which they must adhere. How do I respond appropriately to the multiple indigenous students’ in my health class who just informed me that they smoke marijuana with their parents on a regular basis? Keep in mind that I just completed a lesson, informed by state-level standards, aimed at promoting the exact opposite with regards to behavior. Will I come across as culturally-insensitive if I openly disagree with this practice? What is the most effective strategy to engage the student who refuses to participate in class? How do I balance the pressure to emphasize policy-mandated criteria with activities that my students find more relevant and engaging? It is well-documented that teacher rapport—including care for students, recognition of student individuality, and teacher enthusiasm—is linked to student motivation and performance (Bergin & Bergin, 2009).

In truth, the data relating to ongoing neoliberal educational reform efforts indicates the failure of such movements to bridge the targeted achievement gap. UC Berkeley School of Law professor Christopher Edley, Jr., who chaired the Equity and Excellence Commission established by Congress to advise the U.S. Department of Education on disparities that contribute to the achievement gap, said the continuing achievement gap demonstrates that the “approach to school

reform starting with the 1983 ‘A Nation at Risk’ report has run its course and left us with this yawning gap that is endangering America’s future”. Given short shrift in the accountability reform era is the preponderance of research showing that the greatest predictor, by far, of how well or badly a student performed in school was his or her socioeconomic background.

Policy-makers have been quick to dismiss any reference to a child’s background as an ‘excuse’ to let schools off the hook, instead positioning blame externally students, teachers, and administrators. This discourse has resulted in both intended and unintended consequences.

Blaming those at the school-level allows reformers to ignore the costs while subsequently preserving the status-quo. Because of the way “achievement gaps” are measured—using scores on standardized reading and math tests—any effort to ‘close’ the achievement gap must necessarily focus on instruction in reading and math. These developments, in turn, have compromised schools’ ability to cultivate students’ aptitudes and talents (Hess, 2011). The emphasis on the statistical nature of the achievement gap is in no doubt related to the popular perception amongst reformers of schools as instruments to be used in crafting desired social outcomes, capable of being fixed through legislative solutions and federal policies. I have come to understand, now, that most of the thinking about achievement gaps is fundamentally flawed due to its location in the context of *social justice*, rather than in the context of *educational reform* itself. Thus, gap-closers approach the problem as social engineers, rather than as educators.

Despite my awareness, the growing sense of deprofessionalism resulting from the ‘blaming’ discourse prevents the development of rapport by increasingly dictating the work of educators. Teachers feel the stigma, and faculty morale continues to erode in schools across the country (Gardner, 2010). This is evident in data derived from the Hawai‘i Department of Education School Quality Survey for the 2014-2015 school year, which lists the state average for

the category of ‘Teacher Satisfaction’ at 60.2%. At the public school where I served, this number sits well below 40% (“School Status and Improvement Report”, 2015). I predict a correlation exists between the student demographics of a school and the subsequent teacher satisfaction ratings. Although the legislative formula for school funding in Hawai‘i positions them as such, all schools are not equal. The student body at Onshore High School is overrepresented by the Native Hawaiian, Filipino, and Samoan ethnic groups positioned at the bottom of Hawai‘i’s social hierarchy. Glassy High School, located only a ten minute drive from Onshore’s campus, sits in an upper class neighborhood. The student population at this school is comprised primarily of East-Asian and White ethnicities which are positioned atop the social hierarchy. An examination of the teacher satisfaction level here reveals a statistic significantly higher than the state average.

Teaching is a unique profession due to its personal nature. Teachers invest their selves in their work, and therefore closely merge their personal and professional identities (Nias, 1996). Nias contends that teachers derive self-esteem, fulfillment, and vulnerability from teaching experience, which can have serious implications for identity development. In this sense, applying for employment within the Hawai‘i Department of Education is similar to playing the lottery. Applicants do not have the ability to apply to select schools within the state-wide school system. Instead, they are allowed to rank districts (comprised of regions of the state) in order of most preferred to least preferred. Even then, the applicant is at the whim of an unclear process. The district within which Onshore High School is located was not my first or even second preference. The specific school context where a teacher ultimately is placed matters in terms of career trajectory. The ongoing turnover of faculty members at my school was so common that it became normalized. On the other hand, Glassy High School rarely has job openings.

I can best describe my experience as a public school educator in Hawai‘i in terms of a visualization. Picture, if you will, a teacher who is juggling an institutional demand for satisfactory scores on summative, standardized assessments with a host of contradictory realities imposed by the context itself. The demands of the institution reflect federal requirements that link school and teacher evaluation to measures of student growth. The Strive HI Performance System, Hawai‘i’s current measure of school accountability, primarily emphasizes the disciplines of Mathematics and Language Arts through an index that places significant value on reading and math growth (“Strive HI”, 2015). The absence of Social Studies from this index reflects a discourse which identifies the discipline as inherently less valuable to school and student success. The subjectivities produced by this discourse oppress Social Studies teachers, who are stripped of autonomy due to a repositioning of the discipline as background staging to the spotlight that testing places on the more valuable discipline of Language Arts. Onosko (2012) dubs the approach of repositioning Social Studies as a means to support Language Arts as a method of “gaming the system” at the expense of the social studies and the field’s fundamental mission of creating more enlightened citizens. Although still subject to content-focused summative examinations, the teacher evaluation criteria for Social Studies educators are predominantly characterized by prescribed measures of student growth that reflect Language Arts skills.

The context, as I have learned as a result of the consciousness brought about in my first vignette, is a direct result of institutional policy. Policy is yet another form of dominant discourse, providing credence to the “master narrative” through the institutional reinforcement the deeply-embedded rules and norms that shape our perception of not only public education, but of those associated with it as well. As a teacher, I made decisions about the value of various

expectations in order to meet the institutional demands required to maintain my employment. A common theme emerges through which an institutional discourse tied to teacher evaluation is emphasized by the teacher, who assesses the realities of day-to-day teaching in the school context before changing (often lowering) specific expectations that are not situated high within the hierarchy of institutional discourse. For example, I learned that in order to complete a lesson (institutional value on content-knowledge) to the roughly fifty students who populated each of my classes (context specific reality), many school-mandated policies pertaining to student conduct went largely unenforced (character education is not tied to high-stakes testing). My first vignette details the harsh realities faced as a result of the cultural contrast between the working-class socialization and positionality of my students and the middle to upper-class values that frame the institutional expectations of these students.

In the course of constructing this critical analysis, I have come to attain a different perspective that falls in line with Milner's (2014) sentiment of the police officer's actions as negative and dangerous. In reference to the example I provide in the preceding paragraph, gradually the consistent lower expectations become rules which serve to cultivate norms and ultimately represent reality. In sum, I present a perspective that is in line with Okamura's (2008) assertion that public education contributes to the institutionalization of inequality among island ethnic groups, particularly those groups located at the bottom of Hawai'i's social hierarchy. He argues "differences in educational access and attainment among ethnic groups in Hawai'i are primarily the result of policies and practices in the DOE... and the state government that discriminates against ethnic minorities and thus foster their educational subordination" (p. 64). Adding a layer, Onosko (2010) argues that federal reform agenda "creates hostile school environments, undermines teacher- student relations, and inflicts the greatest harm on students in

greatest need— that is, minority students and students living in poverty” (p. 2). I needed to look beyond the stigma perpetuated by the master narrative, which associates all aspects of public school as failing, inferior, and deficient. My students are not inferior; they are *disadvantaged*. Regardless of the label placed upon my abilities through evaluation measures, I am not a *deficient* teacher. I am *resilient*; working delicately within the tension that is positioned in-between policy-driven discourses and student’s abilities and needs. I represent a filter – it is my *responsibility* to possess the skills, knowledge, and abilities necessary to handle said policy-driven mandates in a similar manner as one would a ball of clay. Policy – not the educator - is moldable, pliant, and submissive.

As described in the previous paragraph, this inequality takes on various forms as it moves down the hierarchical ladder; all of which serve to perpetuate the subjectivities that are produced and sustained by the “master narrative”. This begins with the state legislature, which serves to institutionalize this discourse through the decision to allocate inadequate funding to the Hawai‘i Department of Education. In turn, the Department of Education reinforces the dominant discourse through the adoption of accountability-based policies which do not reflect the resulting effects of insufficient funding or cultural context on both teaching and learning in Hawai‘i . School leaders hold teachers accountable to these measures, reinforcing a dominant discourse pertaining to professionalism and ‘good; teaching. Pressured to balance a set of unrealistic expectations, teachers must choose between adopting a praxis in line with the institutional discourse – an approach that is tied to teacher evaluation and therefore continued employment – or one which reflects their personal beliefs, values, and professional judgement pertaining to what is best for students.

For those educators who lack a strong sense of resilience and/or personal agency, the resulting conflicts of teacher identity can manifest into negative school cultures characterized by resentment, frustration, and stress. Ultimately, those who stand to lose the most are the majority of public school students who represent the ethnicities that fall at the bottom of Hawai‘i’s social hierarchy. These students are at risk of becoming alienated by a lack of engagement and a perceived inability of attaining school success. Their struggles manifest in a variety of ways that many teachers are not prepared to meet. I can attest that my teacher preparation program did not address the possibility of entering an environment in which students have been socialized into believing that school success is unattainable and insignificant; who, despite intentional acts aimed at disrupting the learning of other students, cannot be sent out of the classroom each day as per administrative regulations aimed at keeping the student retention rate high; whom other students observe as able to ‘get away’ with breaking numerous norms and expectations each day; all of which serve to destabilize your credibility as an educator and deplete the motivation of the class as a whole.

Suggesting that identity is a process, Alsup (2006) writes “Identities are shaped and reshaped through discourses the discourses in which teachers engage” (p. 236). Alsup explains that each teacher has a number of identities, including those outside of school as well as within the school. We all engage in discourses particular to our membership in various groups or communities, all of these contributing to the identity process. Each community to which we belong, Alsup explains, has a discourse to that particular group. Bringing it all together, public schools have been consistently perceived as deficit-laden environments by those around me. Complicating matters, this group includes other public school teachers.

Unable to recognize or exercise subjectivities that veered from the institutionalized dominant discourse, the locus of blame for our struggles is often placed upon self, and often, ascribed to our students. Aside from fellow educators, most got these ideas not through direct experience, but rather through stories heard through others and from a variety of media sources – these were stories of failure, ineptitude, violence, and chronic underfunding. Depending on one’s positionality, the actions of the media, state government, Hawai‘i Department of Education, and/or the federal government demonstrate that these are more than just stories. Over time, these stories had become institutionalized into the informal rules and norms of public schooling: expect less from these students and the system as a whole. This proves dangerous; I unconsciously expected less of my public school students, identifying them as inferior to those which I had encountered in the private school setting. Before this act of critical reflection, the structural and cultural barriers that contributed to my experiences were invisible; negated by the one-size-fits-all application of policy measures and this discourse surrounding them. A lack of knowledge about the inequality within the construct of ‘local’, as well as the beliefs and values common to those ethnicities positioned the top of Hawai‘i’s social hierarchy lends itself to a perception of private school students as “superior” to their public school counterparts. A taken-for-granted assumption of merit is also attributed to their private school status.

The negative stigma that the “master narrative” attaches to public school in Hawai‘i reaches beyond the perceived abilities of students. That is, this discourse also colors society’s perception of public school teachers as well. The unrealistic expectations placed upon schools through accountability-based policy measures serves to demonize teachers, subsequently reducing the status of the profession and ensuring that many of our most talented and motivated young people will not become educators (Onosko, 2010). Private school teachers, on the other

hand, are held in higher regard by the community-at-large. Upon moving to Hawai‘i, I discovered that the perception of public school teachers was in stark contrast to that of New Jersey, where the teaching profession is largely respected and practitioners viewed as professionals. Over time, I have learned that the difference in perception can be attributed to the sheer difference in average teacher income between the two states. According to the National Education Association, New Jersey ranks first nationally for average beginning teacher salary and places in the top five for average teacher salary (“State by State”, 2010). Hawai‘i, on the other hand, sits at the direct opposite end of the spectrum. When adjusted for the cost of living, Hawai‘i ranks last nationally pertaining to average teacher salary (“Analysis: Hawai‘i”, 2016).

My positionality in Hawai‘i as a White “transplant” from the U.S. mainland correlated to my occupation of a lower social position within Hawai‘i’s social hierarchy. Despite my job as a public school teacher, the ‘non-local’ identity marker that is associated with the label of “transplant” was one that I could not seem to unfasten. For quite some time, I problematized my “transplant” identity marker due to negative personal and professional implications associated with it. I remember feeling offended and frustrated during some of my earlier job interviews because of the ever-present questions targeted at my transplant status. “When are you going to leave?” “*Why* are you here?” I perceived these questions as an indication that I was being portrayed through a deficit lens, reinforcing a notion that I was a cultural outsider. My value as an educator, it seemed, was diminished before I even had the opportunity to respond. Through my subjective - and inherently uncritical - lens, these types of questions were both inappropriate and unprofessional.

Critical reflection traces the roots of the “transplant” discourse to Hawai‘i’s historical struggle to stem high teacher attrition rates - a number that is even higher for the large number

who come from the continental U.S. (Cerball, 2016). Years later, I was no longer consistently on the receiving end of this line of questioning as I once had been. That is, when identified with Barrel School, I attained an elevated social position. A statement made at the time by my then girlfriend's mother, a Japanese American of high socioeconomic status, demonstrates the power of the "master narrative" on the perceptions and expectations of teaching held by dominant society. Upon learning of my employment at Barrel School, she told her daughter, "Good. Now he works at a *real* school". In her opinion, which is shared by many, private school settings were perceived as places where the 'good' teachers in Hawai'i worked.

Race, ethnicity, and class also played a significant role in my perception of the "master narrative" as valid. My positionality as a 'cultural insider' while growing up in suburban New Jersey afforded me access to the possession of the three forms of cultural capital which Bourdieu (1986) argues support the acquisition of competence in society's high status culture. In the embodied state, cultural capital takes the form of long lasting dispositions of the body and mind. As a White male of middle-class means, culture was an invisible force and the power of dominant norms were so internalized that they were taken for granted. The dominant Euro-American values associated with my upbringing framed identity as 'what one does' for a living over 'who one is' as a person. In line with this, one of the most significant insults located within the discourse of my cultural upbringing involved being labeled as dependent or reliant on others.

The preoccupation with upward mobility demonstrates an adherence to the middle-class ideology of individualism. Jung (2007) explains, "In the middle-class conception, the individual is unfettered by family or other group affiliations, and one is afforded equality of opportunity to make the best of oneself" (p. 7). This reflection reveals that teaching in a private school context represented action towards the upward mobility – both social and economic – that defined my

worth as an individual. Other culturally-instilled perceptions pertaining to professionalism proved to be influential factors in my unconscious acceptance of the “master narrative”. One of my first impressions of Barrel School involved the formal manner of dress by faculty members; who wore aloha shirts, slacks, and dress shoes. Within Hawai‘i’s public school settings, many teachers wore shorts, t-shirts, and sneakers. Although I had attributed this manner of dress as appropriate in light of the lack of air conditioning and other ‘standard’ comforts that I associated with ‘proper’ educational contexts, it none-the-less contributed to my deficit view of the public school system.

Collectively, these insights aim to demonstrate the extent of the impact which my un-interrogated cultural lens had on the personal, professional, and situated dimensions of my teacher identity when met by social, cultural, political, and economic forces – both visible and invisible – present in Hawai‘i. I struggled to rid myself of an inferior form of self-persecution due to the pervasive impacts of the “master narrative”. This discourse serves a purpose that aims to marginalize, rather than empower. It perpetuates, rather than transforms. I was not the same insecure little boy with a stuttering problem; inherently deficient. I demanded a counter narrative, and ultimately came away with a corrective narrative.

Vignette 4: “Color Blind”

“That’s your *choice*, Nick!” I can now hear stress in Alfred’s voice. This is an escalation from the facial gestures and body language that characterized his non-verbal cues only minutes ago. Something in him has given way. Alfred no longer sounds as if he is pleading with me. He’s angry.

Before I have an opportunity to respond, Alfred repeats his point again, only louder. “You have a *choice* not to identify with anything!” I can sense that a few of the students in this doctoral class have taken notice. The chatter, laughing, and other sounds that had accompanied this small-group discussion activity have died down.

The last thing I need, I mumble to myself, is to draw the attention of...

I would prefer to remain invisible. Describing this classroom environment as one of ‘hostility’ is a gross understatement. *They* attack indirectly, harshly criticizing teachers, school systems, and the White race, amongst others. They have recently begun to associate my positionality with privilege. Although these criticisms are often directed elsewhere, I embody many of the same subjectivities that they paint in such a negative light. The level of tension has grown exponentially each week, as I can no longer bury these unsettling emotions. They almost boiled over last week when the teaching assistant referred to me as a “colonist”.

But why? This is certainly not the first context where I have endured such harsh criticism.

Gosh, I think to myself. I’ve been cursed out and threatened on multiple occasions while surfing on the basis of my skin alone. Those instances were more frightening than this. In addition, my local friends call me a ‘stupid haole’ all the time. It’s actually sort of endearing.

I also acknowledge that acts of professional criticism are an almost daily occurrence. *Fellow teachers, administrators, parents, the media... It’s everywhere!* Once again, I’ve endured much worse than the vernacular being tossed around by some of the individuals in the class

So what gives?

Almost immediately, a clear and concise thought comes to mind – a thought that I am unable to say out loud but which I also cannot deny.

They are such lazy people. How do I justify such a strong sentiment? My memory drifts back to the introduction activity that took place during our first class meeting. I found it

remarkable that only five other individuals in this upper-level doctoral course possessed actual classroom teaching experience. This original sentiment was spurred by curiosity alone; taking into account the high rate of teacher attrition in Hawai‘i, I pondered why these individuals did not first jump into the ‘trenches’ before deciding to pursue such an advanced course of study. After all, the realities of day-to-day teaching reside in stark contrast to the air-conditioned glory of discussing theory in class once a week. I enjoy going to doctoral classes in the evenings; I don’t *always* enjoy dealing with disruptive students, grading stacks of writing assignments, or dealing with school administration members. A bit of rhetoric from my father winds across my consciousness:

Only a lazy person would complain about something that he or she knows little about or is unwilling to actually fix.

In actuality, I originally utilized a different term in place of ‘lazy’ – one that is a bit vulgar. “Assholes”. This is a label placed on individuals who embody a general mix of arrogance, rudeness, and incompetence. Although this term was used often during my cultural upbringing, I am uncomfortable using it in public. I substitute the term ‘critic’ in its place.

I am getting somewhere now. Clearly, I feel protective of *something*.

The critics cannot possibly comprehend how challenging my journey of becoming an educator in Hawai‘i has been. I am *not* privileged. I arrived here with no job, eventually waiting tables in restaurants in order to squeak by for almost an entire year. I begged and pleaded my way into the first position I attained – a part time job instructing at an online charter school. I had to compete against three other part-time hires over the course of an entire semester as only one of us would be offered a job the following year. I have gone above and beyond the professional expectations in each of the settings where I had taught. I have stayed up all night on many occasions. I have been cursed at, sabotaged, and threatened. I have all but given up on cultivating any semblance of a personal life for the last five years. I *am* my work. I have not seen my parents in two years. *I have earned this.*

Glancing around the classroom, I observe the critics silently. I think to myself, “*I will outwork and outhustle you any day of the week... and twice on Sunday!*”

I am feeling fierce. Empowered.

Alfred reestablishes eye contact, bringing me back to the present.

“Don’t you understand!?” The tone of anguish in Alfred’s voice suggests that he is seeking more than his question suggests. He is no longer interested in ascertaining my level of

clarity pertaining to his argument. This question feels like a demand. It also feels like a conveyance of Alfred's disappointment.

Damn.

I *want* to understand.

I have cultivated a deep respect for Alfred over the last three years. We entered the doctoral program together but had never truly met one another until last year. Yes, there were the first-day-of-class introductions through which I attained a surface-level understanding about his background, experience, interests, and goals. He was a full-time student, which I envied. I, on the other hand, spent my days in the "trenches" as a full-time high school teacher. After school, I would drag myself to class using the little energy I had left. As such, my outgoing nature did not always make it to campus with me. Still, I enjoyed listening to Alfred's stories of personal experience. He *cared*. It was authentic. Alfred spoke passionately about social justice and critical pedagogy. I envied the fact that he had established a meaningful research focus for his dissertation. I was too busy with the commitments associated with my teaching job and doctoral course work to explore research interests.

You can learn a lot about a doctoral student through a knowledge of his or her research interests. I got to know Alfred on a more significant level as we progressed deeper into our doctoral coursework. Now, the courses in which we enrolled provided more in the way of autonomy. The structured research and writing skills attained as the result of our entry-level course work was increasingly being applied to our own areas of interest. I learned a lot about Alfred. He embodied multiple social identities, which fall under the 'non-dominant' category in most contexts. These social identity markers meant little to me at the time. I was drawn to Alfred because of his intelligence, quick-wittedness, and most importantly his dry sense of humor. In truth, I am proud of my disposition... I do not acknowledge his various identity markers. I accept Alfred unconditionally.

I *want* to understand.

Fierce? Now I feel ashamed. I have let a friend down, and worse, see little in the way of a solution that might help resolve this situation.

The instructional method shifts to a class discussion format. *More complaining.*

The usual three or four critics overpower the voice of the other twenty-something students in the classroom. I feel insulted. Despite their lack of experience, these individuals *know*

that White people are the cause of most of the problems in our state. Gradually, I work up the courage to raise my hand and finally address them.

“The sentiment shared by those who have spoken thus far reminds me of a topic that I am currently teaching to my freshmen this week at school. I view your immense racial and cultural pride as dangerous – it opens up a space for blame and subsequently hatred. This reminds of the blind nationalism that served as a catalyst for World War 1. You have placed the label of ‘colonist’ on me for many weeks in a row, yet you don’t even know me. You don’t know my beliefs or my values. That kind of disposition is dangerous”.

The professor responds, “What are your beliefs and values, Nick?” *I’m beginning to feel very nervous.* Drawing too much attention to oneself, I was taught, is inherently embedded with negative consequences. The more that ‘they’ know about you directly correlated to more ammunition that ‘they’ have to take you down.

I swallow slowly to compose myself. The critics in this class all-to-often respond with emotion – a practice that my cultural upbringing problematizes. I must attempt to use logic and rationale.

“My family has absolutely zero cultural pride. We rarely, if ever, associate with our European ethnicity. In fact, I am not even clear about my ethnic makeup. Nobody in my family seems to have a definite answer. When pushed, I tell people that I am Italian because that is what most of my friends were while I was growing up. My mom is part Sicilian so perhaps there is some truth to this. The construct of race is also a non-factor when we make decisions. My father did not get to make a choice when he was sent to fight in Vietnam. He was poor and White. My mother grew up fatherless, raised by an alcoholic mother well below the poverty line. When situations don’t turn out in our favor, we blame ourselves. I hear so many excuses in this classroom. What I do not observe is much in the way of tangible plans of action or self-sacrifice. I am more than ‘White’ or a ‘colonist’. Being a teacher defines who I am – I try my best to embody the selfless, caring, and patient qualities that we like to associate with educators. I heard some of you talking about trips to mainland and fun weekend plans before class today. I’ll be tailoring a curriculum to meet the interests and abilities of my students on Saturday. On Sunday, I will be providing each of them with individualized feedback. I believe that those actions, which I have demonstrated for many years now, define my character more so than any label you choose to toss at me.”

“Anyways,” I add, “I guess what I am trying to say is that I have begun to associate talk about ethnicity and race with misdirected anger. I am not some kind of rich, White, Ivy-League graduate. It makes me feel uncomfortable. I cannot help but to question your credibility – both personally and professionally, when you do so.”

I think to myself, *“Man... you really put the critics in their place!”*

A voice next to me blurts out, “You have a point Nick, but listen to me right now. I don’t HAVE a choice, Nick! I don’t get to choose an identity. I’m *identified*”

It’s Alfred. The respect I hold for him both personally and professionally will not allow me to brush off his sentiment. Alfred does not make excuses. He has my attention. I am not just listening to Alfred, I am *hearing* him.

“You have the privilege of not having to *see* culture Nick”, he continues. “Your culture is your race. But all of us,” he says, looking around the classroom, “who are not White are held to the standards of *your* culture too. Don’t you get it now”?

I am about to interrupt him with a knee-jerk response about “our” culture... but something has clicked in my mind. Alfred has tears in his eyes. Despite my ignorance, I am an empath.

Wow. I cannot explain it, but I immediately feel as if I am looking at the world through a new lens. Alfred is my friend. I have had and continue to have friends of various racial backgrounds, but none have shared this sentiment with me.

Alfred, of all the people in my life, had managed to interrupt the assumptions that had increasingly become more and more deeply entrenched in my consciousness since... well, since birth!

The script was flipped, Alfred had delegitimized Whiteness. I was a White person who could not recede into privilege.

An unsettling experience indeed.

Yet I remain conflicted. I’m not fully sold. I agree with Alfred, but I am still skeptical about the other critics. The line between holding a critical perspective and the art of excuse making is unclear; a blurred and contested space.

Initial Analysis

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary (2016), racism is “a belief that race is the primary determinant of human traits and capacities and that racial differences produce an

inherent superiority of a particular race”. At the time of this critical incident, I had assumed that my logic made complete sense. Put simply, I did not consider myself to be a “racist”. Lived experience led to the internalization of two polarizing options pertaining to this construct: an individual was either a racist or not a racist.

Racism was voluntary. Racism was intentional. My subsequent logic suggested that I must be innocent because I did not make a purposeful choice.

Today, I cannot help but cringe when I reflect upon this critical incident. My thinking was so black and White. The presence of a ‘middle ground’ did not occur to me then. If in fact one was not a racist - as was my case - the conversation need go no further.

Why was I so defensive?

But it did go further in this specific case. This represented uncharted territory for me. I was challenged and then trapped – I was forced to confront my own positionality as a raced individual. In turn, this led to feelings of anger and frustration that manifested into the defensiveness that is so prevalent in this vignette. I thought to myself, “The message that ‘race does not matter’ has been reinforced by my family, teachers, and even the media. Why am I being challenged?” I felt *insulted*.

Further complicating matters was a deeply embedded self-perception of my attitude towards race as genuinely well-intentioned. I had been socialized into problematizing the act of *seeing race*, associating this practice as one of many potential acts that fall under the label of ‘racist’ behavior. Seeing race, I assumed, meant acknowledging difference. This was taboo within the cultural fields of my upbringing. It proves remarkable that I automatically associated this ‘difference’ through a deficit-lens, unaware that I had in fact been racialized in settings that were predominantly White.

Where we do not see difference, questions about difference are not raised. Instead, the values and beliefs of the dominant culture, a culture that I was a member of, represented nothing less than the normal way of the world.

In response to a classmate's question about the role that race had played in my life, I offered a non-racial, individualized characterization of myself. *Privileged?* Never! I had worked hard for my achievements!

And I *did*.

"Ideologies" explains Lewis (2001), "tell particular kinds of stories about the way the world works" (p. 799). Hall (1990; as cited in Lewis, 2001, p. 799) defines ideology as "those images, concepts and premises which provide frameworks through which we represent, interpret, understand and 'make sense' of some aspect of social existence" (p. 8). As I have learned from the example provided by Milner (2015), ideologies are not individually generated. Instead, they are part of a larger set of stories told again and again in political speeches, by neighbors, in newspapers, etc. Lewis locates the power of ideologies in their ability to "facilitate collective domination in such a way that they often make vast inequalities understandable and acceptable to those both at the top and the bottom of the social order" (p. 799).

This initial analysis took a different tone than the others in this self-study. My habit of looking inward and continuously self-reflecting led to action. I research, learned, and reflected some more. I began to understand that my actions collectively exemplified the color-blind ideology that is commonly held by many White Americans. A color-blind ideology presumes or asserts a race-neutral social context (i.e. race does not matter here) and involves non-recognition, the process of noticing but not considering race (Crenshaw, 1997; Bonilla-Silva, 2001; Lewis, 2004). Further, such a perspective assumes that discrimination is a thing of the past and denies

the reality of race and racial inequality today. Those who adopt this approach argue that we should treat people as simply human beings, rather than as racialized beings.

But I remained perplexed. I was very much aware of my possession of this ideology at this time of the critical incident. In fact, I was proud to own it. If I am to follow the logic I posited above, my *intentional* possession of a racist ideology makes me a....

No! I am not a racist.

On countless occasions, family members, teachers, and college professors had referenced Martin Luther King Jr.'s (1963) plea to 'judge a man by his character and not the color of his skin'. I am aware today that this sentiment served to reaffirm within me an acceptance of the inequality so prevalent all around me. Initial reflective activities also bring to light the accompanying ideology of meritocracy, which serves to further justify the colorblind position. The ideology of meritocracy instilled within me a belief that individuals succeed or fail according to own merit.

My positionality as a cultural outsider – a transplant - in Hawai'i, led to experiences which suggested meritocracy was nothing more than a myth. One's ownership of a 'local' identity marker provided privileges, large and small, in all areas of life – ranging from employment opportunities to one of the best waves in set while surfing. How could I deny what I have seen with my own eyes and heard with my own ears? Depending on context, I observed there to be a hierarchy of sorts within the construct of 'local'. For example, the local high school that an individual graduated from was often used to type an individual: hard working, capable, poor, low class, high class, etc. Or, for instance, one's race might be used to make similar judgements.

According to Crenshaw's (1989) model of intersectionality, modes of oppression within society do not act independently of one another. Instead, forms of oppression interrelate, creating a system of oppression where multiple forms of discrimination intersect. In this regard, my identities as both a haole and as a transplant take on new meaning when applied together.

Hawai'i was not a meritocracy. Clearly.

Growing up in a New Jersey suburb positioned in-between the major metropolitan areas of New York City and Philadelphia, there was certainly no shortage of media attention of events that depicted racial minorities in a negative light. Today, I sit flabbergasted reflecting upon how I grew up unable to consciously distinguish my life from that of the gang-member from a state-housing 'project' in Queens who was charged with drug possession/assault with a deadly weapon/murder. I was not isolated from these places. The majority of our relatives, primarily of working class backgrounds, lived within or near these cities, boroughs, etc. I played in basketball leagues within them. It was not uncommon for me to walk through these neighborhoods with friends and cousins. Anyone would be able to see with their eyes that these places were not the same as the suburbs. This example shows how cultural narratives come into play. The dominant discourses of society justify these differences. We use these narratives for sense-making purposes; in order to understand.

Unfortunately, these narratives are powerfully reinforced. I watched the stories on the evening news every night. I listened to hip-hop music where artists not only confirmed, but championed the very activities which the dominant discourse used to validate the social hierarchy. Heck, I still love hip-hop music and am fascinated by how so many artists today aim to bring awareness to the root causes of the end products we see on the news. They are producing counter-narratives of their own. However, an unawareness of oneself as cultural or ethnic being

correlates with the extent of one's socialization into internalizing the dominant discourses. And that was me.

I can see why my perception of a colorblind ideology was positive – a moral and socially responsible disposition... and I do not like what I am beginning to understand.

I feel ashamed. I feel *stupid*.

In sum, I had unknowingly cultivated a perspective of racial minorities as inferior to that of my race. A color-blind ideology leads to the conclusion that we've done all we can, therefore any differences we see in the success of racial groups is due to inherent differences in the groups themselves. The generalized "gang member described above"? Oh, he just lacked the values and dispositions needed for success. It pains me to say this as I have come to possess a more critical awareness of my positionality and racialization. While many people naively embrace this view as non-racist, it becomes clear that it reinforces and reproduces contemporary systemic racial inequality by denying its reality.

Oh, the irony. The picture is becoming very clear.

I am a racist.

Critical Catalyst: *Unwilling or Unable?*

Introduction

The impetus for this autoethnographic journey stemmed from a decade over which the stories that I told myself had gradually begun to fail. However, in 2016 my most foundational stories all seemingly came crashing down at once. A shift occurred in my understanding of childhood pain and its impact on one's life and narrative. This shift was spurred by my exposure to an extended period of psychological abuse. Emancipating myself from this abuse marked the beginning of a larger battle with the lasting effects of psychological trauma.

Part 1: An Open Letter: "A Quicksand Foundation"

"I was so busy trying to protect you that I could not see that I needed to be protected from you"

There is no real way to describe what narcissistic abuse does to a person. I didn't think it was even real - just a term people tossed at others who were selfish. Its destructive emotional potential is impossible to understand unless it is experienced.

Nobody will ever hurt me as much as you did.

That feeling. The one after the abuse but before you learn what it is. I hope you never experience that.

But knowledge is power.

What I learned about the disorder at my lowest shook my world and opened up my eyes. The smear campaign, your unhealed wound, the self-victimization... How all of my positive qualities, even the ones I did not know about, were ultimately what kept the cycle going.

This marks the first time in my life that I possess a true sense of self. But wow, did I have to earn it.

You charmed me. You were a heroic victim. The genuinely good person who just had a string of bad luck. Nobody thought to look further into your past. We all believed the few stories you told us and assumed that you didn't want to open old wounds. Friends. Family. You deserved so much better. In spite of all of those who hurt you, you were so supportive, intelligent and beautiful, you pulled me in.

You love bombed me. Idealized me. You came on so quickly.

By the end, I actually believed that I was you, and that you were me. I actually believed it. Wow.

Idealize. Devalue. Discard.

"I hate you; don't leave me."

It was just as the literature says, almost point for point. I never, in a million years, saw it coming. I didn't know *you* existed.

I was embarrassed at first. Ashamed.

I didn't want to appear weak to the world. My pride yelled "I'm not a chump!" But I continued learning.

And I wrote. I wrote to remember; to clear the internal fog of cognitive dissonance. I did not know about cognitive dissonance, gas-lighting, or emotional manipulation back then.

I was broken. Emerging from the cycle appears to be such a positive event. And that's completely wrong. You are still asleep in so many ways. It's worse than the abuse itself.

I wrote in order to live. This went far beyond replacing a story that had failed. I needed a story because I didn't have one.

Nobody knew about my condition; I hid it. I was scared. Something was very wrong.

Repetition compulsion. I couldn't know what it was, though. Re-experiencing the trauma over and over. You cannot fully symbolize the object of the traumatic experience through visual memory. I couldn't know this, though. You have a decreased capacity for this. I couldn't know this, though. Your mind desperately wants a story. I couldn't know that my mind had endured the equivalent of being hit by a truck. It was broken, like a bone. So you relive the trauma – those feelings - time and time again. Uncontrollable. Unpredictable. It's just your mind desperately trying to make sense, trying to understand so it can begin to heal.

But I didn't know anything about that yet. I was only aware that of the emotional instability. It was so intense. I had lost control. I'm not comfortable sharing the intimate details yet. An automatic response to veil from the reader the reality of trauma. I've been stigmatized enough.

I could not hide from everyone. I tried to do the things that made me "me". To get back to "normal". It upset the people who cared about me.

It upset them, but they blamed *me*. Judged *me*. Made assumptions about *me*. Became frustrated, if not angry, with me. I isolated myself.

But I still *didn't* know. It was still weeks before the doctor wrote those five capital letters on the board.

PSTD.

Everyone laughed when I explained to him that I had not run over an IED with my Tacoma. I was in California. I'm now back in Hawai'i. Not Iraq. Not Afghanistan. *Wrong diagnosis, doc.*

Everyone laughed. Yeah... someone had to come take care of me. That is as far as I will go. I fear the professional reprisals. Even the institutional capital of a PhD is deferred to the stigma of being a male victim of female abuse. The stigma attached to emotional abuse.

Invalidation. It perpetuated the cycle. Invalidation turns friends and family members into abusers. How could they be so dismissive? I wanted to yell at them.

“Can’t you see that you’re hurting me?! You are destroying me!”

I wrote my stories in order to live. Even as it got worse. This ain’t heartbreak. Been there, done that.

Cluster B. Narcissism. Borderline Personality Disorder. *Huh?*

No. These were just insults people used to suggest the recipient was *very* selfish or *very* unstable. I was naive. Never even thought to think about these.

“Get over her, dude”

It only got started to get better when I decided that I would never speak to anyone about it again. I wondered if this was just self-victimization, but I became increasingly aware that the invalidation on behalf of “others” was just as damaging as the abuse itself. Only with professional help, I decided. And I haven’t since.

It was when I discovered that I was targeted not because there were so many things wrong with me - but because there are so many things right about me - that was the day I began to heal. I decided that I will not let this wound do to me what yours did to you.

I will continue to be a giver. I will always be a healer. A fixer. A teacher.

It is a gift to be open-minded, to be accepting, to care deeply about others, to possess a genuine desire to serve others. But now I’ll work on creating some boundaries too.

You tried those qualities on but those are mine. I earned those. But I was finally able to own those when I realized that I was looking into a mirror. You has gradually taken my identity and projected your true self onto me.

That’s one heck of wound, babe. I compare it to a black hole in outer space – the kind that’s all encompassing, where gravity is pulling so hard that not even light can escape. *It takes all.*

I can’t believe that you were hiding that. How you *used* parts of me like temporary band aids to make it bearable. And let’s be very clear, you *used* me. The general public tend to correlate that term with a bitter or jealous ex-partner. Most cannot understand the nature of how you *use*.

I didn’t know that yet. *I was still in the fog.*

I saw your anxiety meds. I was well-aware of your attachment issues. I’m kind, not blind. I loved you more because of your flaws. These days I wonder how many of your flaws were actually just forms of manipulation instead.

I knew about the self-medicating you did each evening - when they legalized it recently, you crossed my mind. And I felt genuinely bad for you. Not in a self-righteous sense; not in any attempt to proclaim my superiority. None of that. This process has increased my reflexivity. I felt bad because of what I have learned about Cluster B. I am no longer frustrated with your rigid intolerance for the “Other”. I understand why you are able to have genuine values of your own. No interests. No personality features. You do what you think society will value the most, and I get it. I can’t imagine what it’s like to have no true passions... how empty that must make you feel. How scared you must feel sometimes. You never deserved this.

This transcended you; it has become personal. But I have to be careful about forgiveness. Because acting as if everything is going to be okay one day diminishes what you did; what my family did. It means that those are coming out of the fog will continue to suffer in silence. They will continue to be stigmatized. And I wrote this dissertation to disrupt discourses that marginalize.

Imagine if I had somehow conceived that you were unable to feel empathy or remorse? What if I had been aware of the true self – the one you hide with life or death urgency? I would have taken care of you anyway. Without a doubt in the world. I absolutely would have protected you. I would have absorbed that pain for you. Because I would have been aware. I could have protected myself as well.

You chose to lie, manipulate, and destroy instead. Just like the last *one*. And the *one* before him. Sadly, like the next *one*. But in the end, for you it’s back to an altered reality that you are not aware of; a reality that you see as truth... which makes you so dangerous. And which still confuses me.

Do you *know* or *not know*?

Are you *unwilling* to know or *unable* to know?

How can someone do something *intentionally* harmful, and at the same time remain *unaware* of reality? Can’t you see the pattern by now? How this happens every time – or your history of explosive, messy relationships? How you have always extended blame externally? Can you not look inward?

Are you *unwilling* or *unable*?

But I do hope that you truly wake up one day. That one day you find that the wound has healed and you are finally free from its painful, invisible grip and can see the world for what it really is, babe. On that day you’ll smile. Because on that day you will know you were loved. Only you, I and God (and maybe my father, you know he’s my go-to for advice) know how I tried to love that pain right out of you. I honestly didn’t even know I had that much love to give! I gave the unconditional kind of love that people only read about. Who knew I had it in me?! *Well, I guess you actually did.* It just kept flowing out of me as my person-hood was systematically dismantled until literally there was none left for you to steal... or for me.

Devalued. Somewhere during this process it all became a blur. At some point during this process you broke me.

You were absolutely awful.

Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.

The experts say that once a narcissist can't control you, they will try to control how people see you. As far as I'm concerned, it's impossible to change anyone's perception of a narcissist. They give amazing performances of innocence and charm. Always painting themselves as the victim. The girl I met was *Dr. Jekyll*. To most, she still is.

It's in personal relationships that *Mr. Hyde* is exposed

I was aware at first, but I respected you. I loved you. You blamed it on their abuse from the past. I didn't tell anyone. I never recognized any of it as *emotional manipulation*. No, I just saw you crying. I saw panic attacks. And when confronted with the truth, I saw you respond with explosive anger. You blamed me.

Those are only your *direct* actions. It was the more frequent *indirect* forms of manipulation that we learned caused my trauma. *Walking on egg-shells*. The crying on command, the guilt trips that you knew I would face because of my habit of always placing blame on self rather than projecting it outward... knocking me down and then selflessly being "the willing helper" - a hero - to help me back up.

You set me up from the beginning. *The Primal Wound. Your therapist. ENFJ-T*. This was a level of emotional manipulation that Freud would not have been able to successfully navigate.

All I did was go to work and come home each day. Occasionally I worked on my dissertation before or after school. Just like we talked about for months before I moved across the ocean to be with you. That was when I secured my own apartment, excited that I'd only be across town from you. The following day you professed your love for me. *Damn*. The "L" word! You *insisted*. I needed to move in with you. Didn't you just say a month ago that it would take a very long time to love again after all of the abusers who had taken advantage of you in the past? I'll admit, I knew my intentions were fantastic; I thought if I worked *really* hard, you and I would be saying that word by Christmas. I don't use that word lightly.

I couldn't understand why I felt increasingly worse. Yet I knew, somehow, that I was an awful human being. The fact that it didn't make any sense never occurred to me. My students seemed to love me. Teaching them was amazing. The school administration praised and supported me; they were wonderful. My co-workers were simply awesome; we became friends and helped each other out. I cared for all of them, just as I cared for you.

Did I transform into a monster on the ride home each day?

What else did I do besides teaching and working on my dissertation? I cooked dinner for us. And I drank some amazing India Pale Ale's while doing so. I went to the yoga classes you taught. We visited the city. These things made you happy. It should have been obvious.

Gas-lighting. Cognitive dissonance. Anxiety. Depression. Hopelessness. No self-worth.

But I was *supposed* to feel those feelings. I've felt them my whole life. I have felt them for so long that I didn't even know what they really were. I felt them even when it should have been crystal clear that I wasn't supposed to; when everything I did stood in such stark contrast to what they represented. They were *always* in the periphery. I tried to deny them. But I was never able to escape them.

The vast majority of "others" can't understand what they don't know. I understand this; it's okay. But it's when, so commonly, they *refuse* to accept that. I'm not okay with that. With *refusal*.

It makes them uncomfortable when it doesn't fit into their stories. They are scared. They are the status-quo.

I am the "Other".

Discard. I was still in the fog, though. With nothing left to offer you and so desperately in need of healing like never before in my life, you slammed the door shut. You said those awful things to me. Instead of wondering where the "old" you went, that charming and supportive girl I met back then, you convinced me, you convinced *us*, that the "old" me was gone.

The silent treatment. I had to have the professionals show me the literature to believe it. It was the darkest period of my life. I had become fully dependent. The power you felt... it filled your wound. You were needed. You felt value, a sense of self-worth. I was *narcissistic supply*.

It was the most malicious act I had ever witnessed, much less experienced. This makes sense now.

I still like to think that it wasn't intentional; that the borderline/narcissist did this to me, not you. That it was *inability*, not *unwillingness*. A human being wouldn't knowingly do this type of damage to another.

I'll never know for sure.

You were not human. You are remorseless, incapable of feeling the true sense of empathy that you tried to take from me. You are a machine.

Which is why I could not understand your rationale or logic. I could not tell if you were *unable* to understand any other perspective besides your own – or if you were *unwilling*.

I could sense it when I sat down at the desk to work on my dissertation. But you told me how crazy I was. How mean I was. How harsh my tone of voice. But I sensed your negativity. Your mannerisms. The passing comments and little rules which you insinuated were deal breakers. You'd blow up towards the end. I wasn't doing the PhD like others. I was just plain terrible. I treated you horribly. *What? Nobody had ever accused me of being hurtful and dangerous like this.* I decided the dissertation must have been the problem. I sat you down; told you I was going to drop from the program. I have a great job. It's chaotic, but I make a great salary and love what I do. Most of our issues stem from the dissertation anyway.

Speak your truth. You used to say often.

You proceeded to insult me. Guilt me. Shame me. Nothing would get in your way of achieving your goals. You said that you would *resent me* if I stopped working on it. You looked at me like I was worthless and pathetic. You broke me that night. And I know that it made you feel good. It made you feel valuable, powerful, and dominant. It feels that void of self-worth for a week or so.

Speak your truth. You used these words often but never truly lived them.

I should have fought back. I should have stood up for myself. But I couldn't. I had lost all self-worth.

I had no chance. I'm introspective. The cycle of abuse wore me down. I stopped confronting you with the truth. It reached a point where I didn't believe that which I saw with my own eyes or heard with my own ears.

And that was the problem. I didn't know how to blame the "Other". I didn't trust myself. I had no sense of self. No core identity. In this sense, babe, we were actually very much alike. But in reality, you have absolutely nothing in common with me.

I will never try to expose you. I know about "narcissistic rage" and the nature of your condition. You'll go to the ends of the Earth to protect your image. *I won't.* I have a vision. I have goals. I have passions. Hobbies. Friends. *I won't.* Nobody will believe me anyway. Some will laugh right in my face, as my friend's wife did. And she's in the 'human' profession as well.

Women don't abuse men. Emotional abuse is not real – it's a case of hurt feelings. Grow up. Be a man. How can you handle a classroom full of teenagers when you can't even handle your woman?

And I've heard enough of that.

What I've learned about *you*... more importantly, what I've learned about *myself* since then... this knowledge makes me hesitant to forgive you. I tend to do this too often and I know why I do. I know that my ease of forgiveness was born from an unexamined assumption that I was deserving the treatment I received. It was born from the guilt and shame I've always

embodied. I am hesitant to forgive again... not until I learn how to do this in a way that serves to empower, rather than marginalize. This part of learning how to love 'self'.

I look at my friend's wife and see a different 'truth' now. It's difficult to explain how I have learned to see flaws in others; to believe in myself instead. It sounds inherently negative. But it's not.

As for the other feelings; the one's of being completely violated, exposed, and used, it's not a problem. I'm working through them.

But I'm no longer angry. The space I occupy is unfamiliar. But here's what I can do:

I accept you.

Part 2: "Out of the Fog"

It takes two to tango.

As I started emerging from the fog, an instinct to look within kicked back into gear. But doing so was different this time. It was not to accept blame or responsibility for the way that others have treated me. It was not to locate my weaknesses under the guise that I was improving myself. I shifted the investigative lens inwards with a knowledge of the fault in these former habits. The very fact that this happened to me – my understanding and internalization that I had going through the entire cycle of covert narcissistic/borderline abuse - had finally shaken the assumptions which informed a negative self-perception. My trauma was real; I needed no other convincing. Further, this allowed me to acknowledge the 'good' inherent within me.

Why did this happen to *me*? What was it about *me* that made me a target for this abuse?

One who embarks on this research journey ultimately comes across a plethora of terms, descriptors, and characteristics: empath, HSP, doormat, 'feels like a fraud', 'no strong sense of self', 'lacking a core identity', 'derives self-worth solely from achievements', workaholic, 'has unclear goals', 'puts others' needs above their own', 'poor relationship with siblings', fixer, helper, healer, scapegoat/golden boy. I did not attempt this feat completely on my own. I urge the

reader who had endured trauma to only do so with the support and guidance of appropriate professionals.

Ultimately the search for understanding led to an examination of my childhood, as well as my family. I choose not to go into detail for personal reasons, but I will share a brief example to demonstrate the nature of this investigation.

There was a time period of my adult life – a span of multiple years – when I called a sibling who lives across the country multiple times a week. Today, I uncertain if this sibling picked up or returned more than one or two of those calls, if that. I called this sibling because I admired him. I cared about him. Wanting to speak to him felt natural to me. It frustrated me that he did not seem to want to make time for me. Fast forwarding to the period of time after my abuse, I mentioned to one of my parents how this sibling's refusal to make time for me made me feel. This was not a new topic of conversation by any means. The parent who I was speaking to automatically replied – as if the subconscious had come racing out, “Do you want to know the truth? He doesn't want to talk to you because you are selfish. He doesn't have time to listen to you or hear your problems. He's busy”. A realization hit me then: this topic had consistently been addressed in a similar manner in the past. If a parent did not have an excuse for him, I would be met with criticism and frustration instead - and this would always stop me in my tracks. It was a discourse when reinforced many beliefs about myself and as well as what was acceptable to challenge and what was not. It reinforced a belief that I was deficient. I “had problems”. These are the same parents who bought this sibling an expensive apartment, thus allowing him to live in a certain area which he could not afford on his own. The discourse which framed any and all of my questions about this was similar. I had ‘learned’ not to ask certain types of questions; to not be critical of specific things or question certain dynamics.

In line with the tenants of critical autoethnography, I reexamined my childhood, taking into account context. The backgrounds of each of my parents was investigated in depth.

Alcoholism. Poverty. Abuse. These were not new insights. I was aware about many aspects of our family history prior to reexamination. The narrative perpetuated by my family was one which suggested that detrimental elements such as these had stopped with *us*; apparently, they were eliminated when I was born. *We* were not like the generation before us; *we* were different. The awareness and knowledge spurred by my own experience of having experienced the cycle of abuse provided a different lens from which to examine what I thought I knew. New insights were continuously compared and connected to interactions, incidents, and events involving one of or all of us spanning the course of my lifetime. Pieces of a puzzle that had previously been invisible started to emerge. Many feelings and events in my life started to make sense – but I caution against carrying an assumption that this indicated some sort of solution. There are no winners or losers when it comes to the impacts of childhood emotional abuse on adult identity. This was, and still remains, a messy process characterized by powerful, raw emotions and self-doubt. On my family's part there is denial, manipulation, and other efforts to discredit, guilt, and shame. There are no winners, and ultimately few will validate you. As much as this process is about re-framing your own narrative in order to live a better life, it is equally an ongoing effort of trying to find a way to live in spite of. It's about being completely alone and uncertain.

It is absolute hell.

Some days I wake up and wish that I was still in the fog. It is all I have known for my entire life. Humans have a tendency to want to make order out of chaos. We like to categorize and pigeon-hole things in order to make them manageable. It's part of our survival instinct to learn lessons from our experience and then generalize them to keep us aware and safe. The fog

represented my possession of a family, a sense of self (albeit a false one which equated to self-sabotage), a purpose, and a direction. Humans, I posit, are more comfortable with the knowledge of *any* foundation – even a flawed or weak one – than not having one at all. Even the knowledge that we are without a foundation for a significant and worthy purpose - so that we can build a stronger, more resilient base - is incredibly unsettling. A structure without a foundation is bound to fail; it's a matter of *when*, not *if*. And although we tell ourselves a new story which acknowledges that this is only a temporary state-of-being, there still exists doubt. We are provided with no guarantee of a more permanent fix.

Ultimately, my initial experience as victim of the narcissistic/borderline cycle of emotional abuse proved too 'real' to negate; too painful and foundation-shattering to ignore or overlook. Referring to the embedded form of cultural capital, Bourdieu (1991) notes that although new habits, mannerisms, and dispositions can be learned, an individual must believe that the action or improvement is *natural* and *right* in order for it to become embodied. This means that in order for something to become internalized as second-nature, it has to make-sense. The knowledge has to integrate smoothly into our existing stories. Ironically, the sense-making which emerged from my abuse, healing, and subsequent learning marked a new experience for me; something felt *right*. It was something I knew to be true – conflicting thoughts or notions lacked any effectiveness in swaying it.

Part 3: Some Thoughts on Stories, Privilege, and Human Nature

While a number of lenses reflecting different critical perspectives were utilized to frame the analyses within this autoethnography, a critical Whiteness studies perspective proved most daunting. I wondered if the same chaotic mix of theoretical knowledge, lived experience, skills, abilities, dispositions, and motivations which had served to promote critical reflexivity in

previous analyses would have a similar effect when investigating the construct of race. I *feared* race.

I'll explain:

It is not uncommon to hear the expression “They just don’t get it” muttered by the member of one group with reference to a difference of another group. For example, a group of teenage students in reference to their teachers (age), or a group of women in reference to men (gender). I understand this statement as speaking not to a lack of intelligence or receptiveness but rather to an abundance of difference, especially relating to one’s perspective or situatedness that is often socially conditioned. In both of the examples provided, each group has the ability to attain a deeper perspective. Teenagers will ultimately grow into adults, their beliefs and values will shift. Men and women have the freedom to marry, forming an intimate bond and thus learning more about the opposite sex.

Race is *different*. As a construct, race does not share the porous nature of other social identifiers. Race is rigid, intolerable, and powerful.

And it is also *inaccessible*.

I can read the vivid, first-hand account of a racial minority and oppression. Better yet, I can listen to a friend describe a similar experience, taking into account his or her tone, facial gestures, and cadence. I can even travel to a location where I am stigmatized – where I am the “Other”. I can do all of these things in order to enhance the critical reflexivity which opens the metaphorical door to critical consciousness.

In reality, though, I will never experience the world in a similar manner to the “Other”. Kim (2016) argues “race is not just something we think and do but also something we feel” (p. 439). Kim sheds light on the *emotions* of race. I am a white male of the dominant culture. The

knowledge that I can walk, drive, or fly away from oppression prevents me from truly grasping the experience.

Willingness. Unwillingness. Able. Unable.

An aspect that even one who possesses the most authoritative grasp of reflexivity cannot fully reach is the full experience of being the “Other”. Despite the possession of relevant theory and knowledge, an ability to critically reflect, a disposition to empathize, and a desire to understand, my positionality as a White male of middle class means – as a member of the dominant culture - negates such a possibility.

Although I have endured an experience that relatively few who share similar demographics can relate to – the experience of being labeled, misinterpreted, brushed aside, and even all together ignored – I possess a specific racial and cultural privilege which extends far beyond the state of Hawai‘i . This privilege has allowed me to overcome some aspects of the adversity attributed to my “transplant” status in Hawai‘i. As the reader will ultimately discover, I have become aware of the privileged and oppressed positions which I simultaneously occupy. I am afforded the privilege to choose not *to* recognize, and not to *be* recognized as, a racial or cultural being within the vast majority of our nation. This privilege is blurred by elements of oppression when applied to my life in the context of Hawai‘i, yet still remains.

Questions still remained.

What is it like to endure oppression that cannot be driven or flown away from?

What is like to be on the other side of White privilege? Or to be continuously undermined the by universalized characteristics of the “proper ways to be” which do not reflect my own culture?

I would not know. I could not know.

Berlak (1999) explains:

Each of us develops regular or habitual ways of seeing the world that are rooted in early childhood, generated from thousands of micro-messages our families and communities send us non-verbally as well as verbally, the books we have read, the media we have encountered, and what we have learned as school... (p. 52)

These cultural forces reinforce and naturalize White supremacy and blindness to the hegemony of Whiteness. It was only when my world came painfully and embarrassingly crashing down - when I endured an experience so traumatic that it would forever change my life - that I became aware that I might be able to partially grasp the reality of being the “other”. The scars that I carry from this experience have changed who I am and who I will be. Much like a racial identity, these cannot be placed aside or removed. *Unlike* a racial identity, I can learn, one day, to keep these hidden away. Ultimately, though, my scars are permanent.

Attempting to connect the impact of childhood emotional abuse on my adult identity to the experience of being the “Other” is complicated. People are incapable of choosing whether or not to be raced, whereas the impact of emotional abuse is not readily visible. I wonder about how much of a privilege this really is then – or if I would be privileged in assuming that it is not really a privilege at all. Referring back to the human tendency to make order out of chaos, this is also where our deplorable tendency to stereotype comes from. It is much easier to assign the characteristics of a few to the many than it is to take the time that is necessary to get to know each one of the ‘many’ on an individual basis. Nancy Kreidman, CEO of the Hawai‘i nonprofit Domestic Violence Action Center, explains “It’s important to note that domestic violence crosses all socioeconomic classes, professions, education levels, religious and ethnic groups. It’s not just

the poor and uneducated” (Yuen, 2012, para. 4). In fact, experts say, when domestic violence happens to people who do not fit the deficiency stereotype held by larger society, the stakes can be much greater. “Because, as an educated or professional person, the victim will say, ‘These things shouldn’t be happening to me.’ And so they have a greater interest in protecting the secret because they are embarrassed,” Kreidman says (Para. 5). There is less sympathy from others and more judgement involved. A dominant discourse associated with any time of domestic abuse faults the abused party for not leaving the situation immediately. This seemingly rationale argument is easier to adopt than instead taking time to learn about “traumatic bonding” and its seemingly illogical position, which indicates how and why it is so difficult for the victim to leave an increasingly abusive relationship.

The question that I am most commonly asked by those attempting to understand my experience is “*How could someone believe a dominant narrative which significantly misrepresents their own lived-experience?*” This seems to defy all logic! The approaches taken on my behalf in the attempt to explain my experience to others were continuously adapted in the fruitless effort to build upon the minimal degrees of success which met previous attempts. Only a few months before, my perspectives on various issues were taken seriously by the same individuals. I desperately *needed* to forget about what had occurred as well as to stop trying to make sense of what I still did not understand in order to function again. I pondered solutions deep into the night for weeks on end in a perpetual state of restlessness, unable to control the frightening and unpredictable array of emotions stemming from a then-unknown condition called “cognitive dissonance”. This term refers to the mental stress or discomfort experienced by an individual who holds two or more contradictory beliefs, ideas, or values at the same time, or is confronted by new information that conflicts with existing beliefs, ideas, or values.

Unconsciously, I had adopted a pattern of denial, diversion, and defensiveness to control the discomfort that I felt. That is, the dominant discourses surrounding my status as victim of emotional abuse had a powerful impact on my own consciousness – to the point where I tried to deny it to myself.

It takes a certain level of disruption to open one's eyes to what has already become internalized. That level is significant. It is uncommon. Until then, we must acknowledge how challenging it is to teach people to face and accept their own identities. Until this is done, said individuals cannot become learners of others' realities. I am not sure about how experience as emotionally abused relates to my perspective-taking abilities with regards to the racialized "Other". I do believe that we share a common experience in the unwillingness and/or inability of the dominant society to acknowledge what to us is 'real'. Subsequently, the impacts of what to us is 'real' are largely negated. We are blamed, judged, and ignored. We are both perceived as the abuser in this sense. And as I have learned, this type of invalidation perpetuates the trauma which holds us back from progress. As I stated before, I can hide my 'abused' identity whereas the racial "Other" cannot. In both cases, dominant discourses that we internalize as children serve as what German author Katharina Rutschky (1977) termed "poisonous pedagogies". Although Rutschky's concept refers to behavior by caregivers that is intended to manipulate children's characters through force or deception, I view it in broader terms. As an educator, I wonder how the hidden curriculum of White, middle class values embedded within the institution of schooling – in which a similar form of embedded cultural capital is not just expected, but required of all students who wish to experience success – is experienced by the "Other" is similar to a child's experience with a poisonous pedagogy in its traditional sense. In this regard, the

experience I have described in this section has certainly opened my eyes to a new perspective on the experience of being an “Other”.

This episode surpasses the mere identification of the dominant discourses and ideologies which hold power over our lives, demonstrating the *nature* of that power as it is filtered by the unique prism that represents the multiple selves each of us embodies. That is, while the dominant discourses and ideologies approach us as a color common to all, our lived experiences as multiple selves – gendered, raced, classed, etc. - produce refractions that are uniquely our own. Which is why the reader, understandably, might not be able to grasp the *sheer positive* I took from the knowledge that in adult to adult relationships, narcissists tend to seek out successful partners – independent, educated, empathetic, and attractive, according to the literature – in order to gain admirations of their own attributes. What was indeed a painful and life-altering experience of emotional abuse concurrently served as an avenue to my attainment of a true sense of self, which had been absent for the duration of my life. Just as we do not judge a rainbow by its quality, but instead celebrate its presence, I intend to approach the individuals detailed within this vignette in a similar manner. In the spirit of autoethnography, the purpose for sharing this personal experience was to evoke in the reader emotions which serve as meaningful connections to their own experiences. Much like a rainbow, newly attained perspectives and consciousness raised are cause enough for celebration. That is, through adopting such a profound new perspective, you – the reader – have managed to challenge your very own survival instincts. Perhaps humans will one day evolve to an extent which more accurately reflects the challenges we face in contemporary society – where the possession critical reflexivity overpowers the human instinct of ‘needing’ to make sense at any expense. For the time being, we must celebrate attempts to attain this social justice mindset.

Critical Analysis: Layer 1

It's true.

A decade ago, I walked into a classroom in Hawai'i. The classroom was filled with students of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds; there were more of 'them' than 'I'. I walked into this classroom without acknowledging that these very students would recognize me as White. Actually, I did not think at all. As a result of my cultural upbringing, the possibility of being viewed as the "Other" never occurred to me. A school was a school – context did not matter. The purpose of all schooling – anywhere in the United States – was the same. It was universal. A look at college campuses around the country reinforced this belief. Or did I see that on television? It really did not matter. As a group, White people were clearly 'good' at the whole school 'thing' – if not the best.

Being an "Other" never occurred to me.

Taking ownership of my racist disposition warrants an exploration of my own racialization and its subsequent impact on my teacher identity. To be critical of Whiteness, according to Leonardo (2010), one must first *locate* it. The challenge, as evidenced above, is that Whiteness passes as 'good values' or a 'universal human nature' when in fact it is particular and partial. As a White male of the dominant American middle-class culture, the term "Whiteness" immediately conjures up images of a racial identity. Even an individual who seeks to problematize Whiteness - to understand its impacts and disrupt them – faces a challenge due to the complexity which characterizes the professional literature on Whiteness itself. In his text *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness*, George Lipsitz (2006) defines Whiteness "as the unmarked category against which difference is constructed". He adds, "Whiteness never has to speak its name, never has to acknowledge its role as an organizing principle in social and cultural

relations” (p. 1). Similarly, Frankenberg (1993) presents Whiteness as more than a racial identity, describing it as “a location of structural advantage, of race privilege” (p. 1). A look at the wider literature reveals Whiteness has been conceptualized as a social construction (Leonardo, 2002, 2009, 2010), a platform (Frankenberg, 1993), an identity (Dyson, 1996), an ideology (Gusa, 201), an institution (Dyson, 1996), a privilege (Lipsitz, 2006; McIntosh, 1990; Sleeter, 2005), an epistemology (Dwyer & Jones, 2000), and as an emotionality (Matias, 2016). In general, however, scholars in the field of critical Whiteness studies agree that Whiteness is “intimately involved with issues of power and power differences between White and non-White people” (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1998, p. 4).

What these definitions do not address is how Whiteness is formed. Beginning to be able to understand and “track” Whiteness, as it is constructed socially and historically, allows us to think about the possibilities of revealing its various operations so as to challenge and renegotiate its meanings (Leonardo, 2010). In this regard, Babbs (1998) provides a description of Whiteness which provides an effective starting point from which to begin this investigation:

Like other racial categories, Whiteness is more than a classification of physical appearance; it is largely an invented construct blending history, culture, assumptions, and attitudes. From a descent of various European nationals there emerges in the United States the consensus of a single White race that, in principle, elides religious, socioeconomic, and gender differences among individual Whites to create a hegemonically privileged race category. (p. 10)

Babbs identifies the contexts in which Whiteness emerged through certain conditions and its effects, which implies (and reminds) the reader that Whiteness is not ‘real’, but instead a

social construction. In addition, Babbs illustrates that Whiteness must be understood as more than a racial identity, acknowledging that in concealing its own internal differences, Whiteness secures power.

Whiteness in contemporary literature has largely been theorized as racial privilege. Zeus Leonardo (2010), Associate Professor of Social and Cultural Studies in Education at the University of California, Berkeley proposes two dialogue starters which he posits can “open the door” the critical examination of Whiteness and White Privilege:

1. Why do so many Whites find it uncomfortable to talk or think about their own racial identity?
2. What would change about Whites’ lived experience if they recognized their own racial conditioning?

I leveraged these dialogue starters, in conjunction with an overall goal of understanding how I developed my racial subjectivities and understandings, to begin my investigation. However, other lingering questions make this a complicated pursuit. I also seek to understand why Alfred’s sentiment, in the particular context of the critical incident storied here, resonated so deeply with me. I want to gain insight into uncovering what ‘sparks’ the process of self-awareness and transformative change in White people. I purposely attempted to limit actions of ‘cleaning up’ the initial structure of this first layer of critical analysis – despite the internal pressures of scholarly logic and rationale that demand I do so – in order to share with the reader the challenging and complex nature of sense-making process. I aim to provide an example which other educators may utilize to begin their own process of self-exploration.

I do not aim to generate solely what scholars in the field deem yet another “White confessional tale” (Pennington & Brock; 2012). However, I do acknowledge both the unavoidable nature and significance of these tales. If I aim to move beyond the production of

such a tale I must first recenter the White experience, realizing White privilege and perhaps even assuaging White guilt. Similar to other acts of critical analysis, my initial purpose aimed to understand. The value of critical autoethnography is revealed by the shifting lenses employed by this methodology of positionality.

Putting it all together, this analysis is about discovering the many things that “White” means, and subsequently examining the implications of these previously questions assumptions. Because class, race, and culture were often conflated when I was growing up, these concepts proved to be as an ideal location as any to dive into my inquiry. Through this analysis, I take the reader with me on this journey of identifying and unpacking the deeply entrenched assumptions and taken-for-granted knowledge that served to frame my perceptions. It is in within the metaphorical ‘space’ between race, class, gender, and the context of schooling where I am able to locate the roots of my own racialization. Taken alone, the impact of each of these does not lend to the cultivation of a deeper awareness of this process. In line with an intersectionality perspective, a critical consciousness is produced only when each construct is understood in relation to the others.

According to my parents, I have always been middle-class. The dominant, middle-class cultural disposition in America perceives identity as defined by personal achievement, reflecting the core value of individualism. By association, individualism carries with it the assumption of meritocracy. Although my parents never referred either of these concepts directly, the understandings that I constructed about what constituted *right vs. wrong*, *appropriate vs. inappropriate*, and *acceptable vs. unacceptable* heavily reflected the values embedded within both constructs. The dominant narrative of my family, which I will deem the “hard work always equals success” discourse, parallels that of the ideologies of individualism and meritocracy in

that the locus of control is attributed to the individual alone, whose ultimate success or failure results from ability and effort. Therefore, I grew up assuming that that people who achieved little were fully responsible for their situation. Demonstrating these values was considered to be synonymous with achieving success as a student within the educational contexts that sat at the apex of my parents' hierarchy of significance. My parents positioned educational attainment as the primary indicator of future success or failure, reinforcing the notion of college attendance as an *expectation* all throughout my adolescence. Educational attainment carried with it the assumption of a 'good' life; all other elements would seemingly fall into place effortlessly. This bit of insight demonstrates how in the western world view, the institutions of work, economy, and schooling are seen as interrelated and mutually dependent. This understanding arises from a certain faith in the positivistic nature of the relationship between these concepts.

As a result, progress in school served as the premiere measure of self-worth throughout my adolescence. When I did not meet expectations, power was exercised to a significant extent through practices of negative reinforcement. In sum, it was through my parents' articulations of power and discourse that my way of "seeing" the world materialized – or so I had assumed. As Bourdieu (1977) argues, the embodiment of practices and ideas into that which feels normal, natural, and "common sense" requires collective reinforcement and approval. As I will describe, the institutional reinforcement of these norms went largely unrecognized due to learned assumptions which conflated race with class and culture. These perspectives collectively functioned to inform an ideology which served as my reality. This ideology framed the possibilities and options of subjectivity.

Whiteness and middle-classness are mutually reinforcing concepts. In contrast to the perspective of my family, Flax (1999) interprets individualism as a "White story line" that

produces and reproduces the idea that each of us is a unique individual and that our group membership, such as our race, are not pertinent to one's opportunities or outcomes. Only after ongoing critical reflection and research was I able to *understand* the following statement: As a deeply engrained dimension of my worldview, the middle-class ideology of individualism served as a force that kept my Whiteness largely invisible. Whiteness, I would learn, is more than an individual identity. Despite this insight, making sense of my own process of racialization proved to be one of the most challenging endeavors in which I have partaken. In comparison to the explorations of my other social identities, this proved to be a most stubborn and difficult endeavor. Whiteness represented much more than the racialized identity that I initially set out to discover. Much time was spent searching within the depths of my consciousness in the attempt to unpack taken-for-granted assumptions which had become deeply entrenched due to the mainstreaming and normalization of Whiteness in the United States. This complicated my steadfast pursuit of a renewed self-consciousness; Whiteness bore many disguises, the most common of which was 'truth'. My Whiteness, as I would discover, was hiding in plain sight the entire time.

Research within the field of Whiteness studies suggests that the difficulties I experienced in locating my Whiteness can be attributed to the "hidden" nature of White identity, which is grounded in the dynamics of dominant group status. That is, a common hurdle confronting White people's efforts of sense-making is the perception of White raciality as "cultureless" (Giroux, 1997). Doane (2003) provides clarification:

Unlike members of subordinate groups, Whites are less likely to feel socially and culturally 'different' in their everyday experiences and much less likely to have experienced significant prejudice, discrimination, or disadvantage as a result of their race. Given that

what passes as the normative center is often unnoticed or taken for granted, Whites often feel a sense of culturelessness and racelessness.

As demonstrated in the vignette, I failed to recognize my own ethnic and cultural heritage. More accurately, I *refused* to recognize these – as if I had awareness and yet chose to ignore them. According to King (1997, 2004), too often the White or Euro-American experience is not recognized as a cultural experience at all. This infers that I held the conception of ‘culture’ as something that belonged to *others*, while Whiteness was perceived as “just normal” (Ladson-Billings, 2006).

To borrow from Sleeter (1993), I have long been trapped in the “curriculum of the status quo”, which has served to structure my life. Sleeter explains:

Given the racial and class organizations of American society, there is only so much people can “see.” Positions they occupy in these structures limit the range of their thinking. The situation places barriers on their imaginations and restricts the possibilities of their vision. (p. 168)

Although my Whiteness became significantly more visible upon moving from New Jersey to Hawai‘i, I was still unable to thoroughly problematize it due to deeply embedded cultural notions of value which had been universally reinforced through powerful social conditioning. In this regard, I had attained a White epistemology. Morrison (1992) sheds light on the inherent danger of an unconscious possession of such an epistemology, noting that the qualities attributed to Whiteness are possible only in relation to their absence in a racialized other.

Frankenberg (1993) specifies that one of the main features of Whiteness is that it is “a ‘standpoint,’ a place from which White people look at ourselves, at others, and at society”, adding that ‘Whiteness’ refers to a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed” (p. 1). In this sense, Whiteness is a particular standpoint from which to see the world and oneself. When I think about the nature of the conflict described in this vignette, the notion of Whiteness as a standpoint can be utilized to raise consciousness regarding the perspectives of both sides of the argument. A standpoint informed by life experiences where the institutions in place – schools, police, and the media – treat you and those around you fairly, equitably, and justly constructs a very different standpoint from life experiences where these same institutions treat you and those around you just the opposite. In other words, I must acknowledge that the meaning of one’s skin color and how it shapes a person’s worldview and lived experience is not inherent in an individual but determined by society.

In her article ‘White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack’, Peggy McIntosh (1990) sheds additional light on how Whites construct meaning with regards to difference:

As a White person, I realized I had been taught about racism as something that puts others at a disadvantage, but had been taught not to see one of its corollary aspects, White privilege, which puts me at an advantage. I think Whites are carefully taught not to recognize White privilege. (p. 31)

Not only is Whiteness largely invisible, as McIntosh alludes to, but it also operates on multiple levels, further disguising it as nothing less than the absolute truth (DiAngelo, 2006). The dominant middle class cultural tendency to construct everyone as an individual hides this operation. Whiteness is *not* simply an individual identity. Thinking about Whiteness as an

ideology, I can see how the conceptualization of race as a bipolar construct operates to make all 'difference' oppositional in nature. The ideology of Whiteness becomes actualized and normalized to the point of invisibility by way of language, media culture, and schooling (Patterson, 1998). However, because Whiteness operate relationally, the interpretation and consequences of Whiteness vary depending who is interacting and in what context.

I was frustrated when my classmates put forward a discourse though which my Whiteness was made visible. Sleeter (1993) highlights the reluctance of White people to engage in conversations about race or racism. When this discourse proved unavoidable, I responded with my own defense mechanisms - discourses of defensive Whiteness. These include denial/selective attention, rationalization/transference of blame, and identification (Utsey & Gernat, 2002). Automatically, I dismissed this specific discourse as nothing more than excuse-making. I even used my classmates' acknowledgement of lacking professional teaching experience as justification to negate their discourse. The word 'privilege' had thrown me off immediately from the get-go. I interpreted this to mean that I did not work hard or put in copious amounts of effort; that my journey within and through the field of education was a pleasant one. Vodde (2001) provides clarity, noting "If privilege is defined as a legitimization of one's entitlement to resources, it can also be defines as permission to escape or avoid any challenges to this entitlement" (p. 3) Attaining greater clarity regarding the strategies I use when my racial privilege is challenged will allow for me to be more effective in challenging patterns of White domination in the future.

I had identified myself in a vague manner. On one hand, I felt that I occupied an oppressed positionality due to a number of unsettling experiences in educational settings which stemmed from my raciality as a haole. On the other hand, I believed that there existed no

boundaries that were preventing my classmates from entering the very public school classrooms of which they were so critical. Having just recently served in the public school system long enough to earn tenure, I was well aware of the significant number of teaching vacancies due to a heightened turnover rate. Working within the context of the public school system was challenging. My class sizes had approached fifty students. The physical condition of the learning environment was barely adequate; some days there were not enough functioning desks for each student. Access to technology was limited and that which we had was outdated. The culture of my specific school had become so negative due to controversy surrounding an administrator that it was featured in the local media. This negativity permeated into our classrooms, where teachers regularly had to navigate combative or non-compliant students while facilitating learning. More than one teacher I knew had been assaulted by a student. Through my perspective, the vast majority of public school teachers appeared to give their best effort each day and long after the final bell had rung, doing jobs that few others seemed to desire. The dominant discourse in Hawai‘i correlates public school as failing, implying that all of its elements were inferior to that of private schools. And now my classmates, who had little, if any, experience were blaming teachers for a variety of the public school systems misgivings.

This angered and upset me. I saw myself as resilient rather than privileged. After all, I occupied a *contested* positionality within the context of Hawai‘i – being a haole transplant made me a ‘double outsider’. I had overcome to attain my position. These specific classmates complained so much, and so often, that I felt justified in my assumption that they would not be able to endure what I had endured as an educator in our state. I dismissed them as overly sensitive and unrealistically idealistic. It appeared that they were out of touch with the harsh realities of teaching in Hawai‘i. However, an awareness of Whiteness as both a platform and as

an ideology fostered a renewed perspective which reveals the extent to which my own White privilege was invisible. My classmates - “Others” – were being measured against what I perceived as normal, familiar, and civilized. I misunderstood my own positionality as an “Other” and adopted a false perspective about my own privileges and oppression. By far, the most significant misconception I held involved positioning schools as politically, socially, and culturally neutral institutions as opposed to sites within which cultural privilege and middle class values are institutionalized. According to Bourdieu (1984), middle-class families pass on embodied cultural capital to their children through socialization. This cultural capital – ways of behaving, language use, and dispositions – is in line with the cultural capital used in schools. I am ‘native’ to this specific form of capital. In schools, this takes the form of the “hidden curriculum” of norms, values, and behaviors that students are expected to learn – or in my case as a high school teacher, are expected to *already know*. These are reinforced institutionally through policies and guidelines which privilege middle-class values.

Applying these expectations to certain student populations can range from pleasant to mentally, emotionally, and physically taxing, depending on the context. Under the false assumption that I was ‘helping’ students of non-dominant cultural backgrounds, my actions undoubtedly led to feelings of exclusion and alienation amongst them. These in turn, ultimately impacted academic performance. In truth, I had previously held an awareness of schools as sites of cultural reproduction but felt powerless, and also *incorrect*, to act against school policy. White privilege, which obscures consciousness of cultural capital as value-laden all together, allows for such a neutral perception. I was supposed to champion certain behaviors, language use, and dispositions because it was expected by administrators – those with the power to hire and fire. In addition, I was well aware of the connection between the performance of my students on the

policy-driven standardized assessments and my overall teacher evaluation. With such large class sizes, the embodiment of these middle class norms was at times necessary. I often felt as if I was stuck between the proverbial “rock and hard place”, forced to balance institutional norms with a classroom reality which varies by context. A teacher must navigate this space delicately and intentionally.

According to Banks (1996), teachers need to examine their own cultural knowledge, stereotypes, and assumptions. In my experience, the students who struggled the most to conform to the embedded cultural capital of schooling were those of ethnicities situated at the very bottom of Hawai‘i’s social hierarchy: the Native Hawaiians, Samoans, and other Pacific Islanders (Okamura, 2008). These beliefs were reinforced over time and in specific settings, leading to an association between specific demographics and behavioral and academic expectations. In contrast, issues related to the embodiment of this capital were significantly absent from the private school settings where I taught. These settings were overrepresented by students of primarily East-Asian and White cultural backgrounds. This knowledge further prejudiced my perception of ethnicity and class positioning in Hawai‘i. As I reflect upon the critical incident one again, I am aware that the majority of my critical classmates represented the ethnicities which populate the lower end of Hawai‘i’s social hierarchy. I had already internalized a certain bias against these groups, yet I was not consciously aware. When I think about the structural challenges that my classmates had to overcome in order to join me in that graduate studies classroom, I feel ashamed for becoming so utterly defensive. The racial privilege which I embodied led to efforts to invalidate their collective experiences on the other end of the representational practices and racial discourses of power that served to marginalize them. The

unequal effects of racism are now evident to me in the more favorable view I held of those East-Asian ethnic groups whom I had encountered within private school settings.

When I think about how this awareness applies to my teaching practice, thoughts of the Eurocentric way of organizing society come to mind. That is, the logic and rationale which inform western thought promote compartmentalization as a means of organizing society. We set up dualistic relationships between work/play, spiritual/civil, home/school, etc. In this sense, teachers cannot authentically take into account the personal character of students as an important aspect of schooling – and yet the embodiment of the ‘right’ character traits play a significant role in determining academic success. This reinforces a perception of White, middle class values as the ‘natural way of things’. Bourdieu (1986) defined embodied capital as consisting of both the consciously acquired and the passively inherited attributes of one's self usually from the family through socialization of culture and traditions. Although embodied capital can be increased by investing time into self-improvement in the form of learning, I am weary of the meritocratic ideology which undergirds this knowledge. Bourdieu (1991) adds clarity, noting that that the individual must believe that the action or improvement is natural and right in order for it to become embodied. The description of my own emotional abuse in the ‘Critical Catalyst’ section of this vignette demonstrates just how challenging it is to internalize something that is not natural.

Educators who serve in contexts where students of disadvantaged ethnic and class backgrounds are overrepresented can take actions to resist the normative discourses which render invisible issues of power and privilege and subsequently bridge this gap of embodied capital. Grant and Gibson (2016) providing a starting point:

If teachers can see their own ethnic and cultural heritage— if they can begin to understand that their “just normal” Whiteness is in fact a culture, and a privileged culture— then they can begin to explore the complex ways that culture functions in learning.

Teacher identity and personal agency are correlated

Teachers do more than transmit or impart knowledge. It is important to highlight the role of educators in framing the context in which content is debated, developed, understood, and problematized. Carr (2016) explains “As knowledge is produced and constructed, teachers cannot exempt themselves from the myriad ways in which students learn and, significantly, how they experience schooling and education” (p. 64). Therefore, knowledge of identity and identity formation prove fundamental to understanding how people of all identities *experience* race, racialization, and racism. This involves critical reflection, on behalf of the teacher, about how dominant discourses exercise power over minorities, and ultimately taking responsibility for the disempowerment of others.

Carr (2016) posits, “...race will remain a fundamental social reality and phenomenon as long as Whiteness is entrenched in the core values, institutional arrangements, and the Eurocentric political order of European-based, and other, societies” (p. 66). This sentiment resonates deeply due to my positionality as a White educator who has started the process of critical reflection in the effort to locate and take ownership of my Whiteness. That is, it is important to frame this process as one of disrupting – chipping away – as opposed to finding some type of magic solution. In this first layer of critical analysis, I became familiarized with the scholarly literature and critically examined a number of what I believed to be direct actions on my behalf which served to protect Whiteness. An emphasis also needs to be placed on the forms

of non-action which are often overlooked yet lead to further social injustice and inequality.

Whiteness operates on multiple levels, and I have only scratched the surface.

Creative Writing Measure: “The Invisible Measuring Bar”

The White, middle-class measuring bar.
 As natural as the world that god created.
 Like the ocean, more powerful than man.
 Obeyed; unquestioned.
 My footprints are compared to an “other”
 I cannot see him.
 He wears a different uniform, they say, representing something unfamiliar.
 We started this race together, they say, but *you* are ahead.
 Two *neutral* paths.
 Run faster and jump higher, they urge.
 You are *better* than he is!
 I am prepared.
 My form is superior; groomed into this since birth, my body flows naturally without thinking.
 Is he right on my heels?
 I hear no footsteps.
 But they are all cheering.
 I work harder.
 Is he like me?
 We are the same.
 But we are not equal.
 I am *better* than he is!
 The finish line is ahead; his lane gradually merges into mine.
 He will have to cross into my path; walk through my footprints.
 I cross the finish line alone.
 There was no “other”.
 Only what I could be.

Why was I so confused when Alfred labeled me as “privileged”? “*Privileged? Not me! I worked hard for this!*” These words were shouted by my class positioning; an automatic, knee-jerk reaction. Engaging the concept of White privilege from an intersectionality perspective reveals that people can be privileged in some ways but not in others. Clearly, I located the values of my upbringing as superior to all others. Yet, as my experience indicates, I did not feel “up” to these values. In addition to lackluster academic performance, my hometown was largely ‘less than’ the White standard I had come to know in New Jersey. These values, I believed, applied

more so to the rich White communities in other parts of the state. I grew up looking the part of the average White boy, but middle and upper-class White people from surrounding communities seemed to peg me a “different”. We did not completely fit into our community either, as my father’s business eventually did well enough to thrust us into a middle-class lifestyle – we learned to be middle-class together. I often felt like I did not have a “place” because the expectations placed upon me (college) were higher than most of my peers. I was not allowed to spend time in certain areas known for trouble, yet my friends were. I can see now that my struggles most likely stemmed from a lack of identity. I guess my larger social environment contradicted the middle-class expectations of my parents.

Social positioning colors one’s perspective on opportunities for advancement in life. However, the privileges that I was and am afforded as a heterosexual, able-bodied White male were largely unacknowledged. I am privileged to be born into a family that encourages and supports intellect and ambition. In line with the sentiment shared by Delgado and Stefancic (1997), I am privileged because *I can turn on the television or open to the front page of the paper and see people of my race widely represented. Similarly, When I am told about our national heritage or about ‘civilization,’ I am shown that people of my color made it. I can talk with my mouth full and not have people attribute this to my color.*

The expectations embedded within the combination of my White and middle-class identity markers served as an ‘invisible measuring bar’ against which my actions were and always have been compared. My positionality as a member of both the dominant race and culture afforded me the privilege of not recognizing this metaphorical ‘measuring bar’ for what it actually is: a set of socially constructed racial expectations, masked as culturally neutral to suggest inclusiveness, which functions to maintain the status quo. Instead, the continuous

reinforcement of these norms at home, in school, in the media, and throughout society fostered within me an unconscious perception of these practices as non-aligned to any race or culture; instead, these norms were just the ‘right’ way to live one’s life. The message received from this reinforcement read “In order to get ahead, follow these rules”. The learning that resulted from an investigation of my social positioning in a previous analysis highlights how the core American middle-class ideology of individualism often manifests into behaviors that serve the “getting ahead” agenda.

Critical Analysis: Layer 2

At this juncture, I seek additional clarity pertaining to how Whiteness is internalized; that is, how I have been socialized into Whiteness. In addition, I aim to more deeply explore my original perception of the relative innocence of those educators who I believe are *unable* to critically reflection on their positionality as ‘raced’ through an investigation of Picower’s (2009) “Tools of Whiteness”, which repositions passive resistance as active in nature. In this regard, I explore the notion and impact of these very same White teachers’ as *unwilling* through a new conception of what it means to adopt a colorblind approach to teaching and learning. A shift in my overall perception of Whiteness on multiple levels resulted in the application of my learning to further acts of critical reflection about my practice in different educational contexts. To begin, I glance into the past once again.

When I entered the teaching profession, a negative hue tinted my self-perception as non-intelligent, selfish, fearful, and lazy. This image was internalized over the course of my upbringing as a result of poor academic performance which steadily increased as I navigated through adolescence and into adulthood. Or so I thought for most of my life. Instead, I know today that my negative self-perception had been internalized through a poisonous pedagogy of

home and childhood. However, the label that was most commonly fastened to my identity during this time period was ‘underachiever’ - and that is what I believed that I was. This sentiment was reinforced by my parents and teachers alike, two groups that served as dominant forces in my socialization. Over time the notion of ‘underachiever’ as a mere label shifted into a self-perception that I embodied this description. That is, I no longer perceived ‘underachiever’ as one undesired self out of many, something capable of being replaced like an ugly seater. Instead, I owned this identity, unaware that other options might exist. Over time, I cultivated of a deep sense of guilt and confusion: Was I actually *dumb* or was I just *lazy*? Reflecting now, the manner by which I framed my possible subjectivities proves remarkable. “Dumb”, in this regard, was an option that represented a rejection of the common assumption perpetuated by my parents and teachers, who attributed my failure to meet specific academic expectations to a lack of effort. To these agents of socialization, I was just “lazy”. However, I was never quite able to take ownership of the “dumb” subjectivity. In fact, I could not even settle for “lesser intelligence” or “lesser capability”.

Critical reflection locates the guilt that I felt and expectations placed upon self as resulting from the comparison of my level of educational achievement to that which was racially and culturally expected of me. It is important to note my use of the word “expected”, which demonstrates a perception of superiority which I associated with my social position of a embodying a particular race and culture: White middle-classness. This demonstrates a taken-for-granted assumption of White superiority: I held a perception of middle-class cultural values as not merely the ‘correct’ way to live, but instead as the ‘only’ way to live. These assumptions were deeply embedded within my consciousness from a young age and were directly and indirectly reinforced in various contexts over the course of my upbringing, ultimately shaping

‘unquestionable’ perceptions built upon invisible beliefs and values. This insight, in turn, sheds light on the “underachiever” label that was placed upon me by my family and teachers, which infers an assumption that my poor academic achievement resulted from a lack of effort – a choice - as opposed to a lack of ability.

I carried this deeply entrenched ideology into my work as a teacher, unaware of its connection to race all together. Gusa (2010) provides a description of this phenomena:

Whiteness as an ideology sees the world ‘Whitely’, which includes a framework of viewpoints and beliefs, arranged into systems of perceptions of self and others, unquestioned assumptions, norms, and hegemony, which result in the unequal distribution of power and privilege based on skin color [Yankee, 2004; Frye, 1983]. (p. 362)

In line with Critical Race Theory’s fundamental tenant which positions racism as endemic, “deeply engrained legally, culturally, and even psychologically” (Tate, 1997, p. 234), the term ‘White supremacy’ is used as description of “the operation of forces that saturate the everyday mundane actions and policies that shape the world in the interests of White people” (Gillborn, 2008, p. 35). Such supremacy, or perhaps dominance, is exemplified by the commonly-held White assumption of White culture and American culture as synonymous. The ideology of Whiteness serves as “a form of social amnesia” that allows White people to forget or ignore how we are implicated in the maintenance of systems of privilege and oppression (McLaren, 1998).

A contextual snapshot of my upbringing reveals the pervasiveness of White ideology. New Jersey, which is positioned in-between the New York City and Philadelphia metropolitan

areas, is a state characterized by immense inequality. In recent times, New Jersey has held the distinction of being the richest state in the nation in terms of median household income while simultaneously playing host to some of the poorest, most dangerous cities in the United States. In 2014, CNN identified Camden, New Jersey as the most dangerous city in the United States while during that very same year, two New Jersey counties made Forbes.com list of the ten richest nationally. As the fourth smallest (square mileage) yet most densely populated state in the nation, knowledge of the sharp disparities in wealth and income is common amongst residents; one must only travel so far in any direction before ultimately encountering such inequality firsthand (Christie, 2014). While New Jersey's status as amongst the most racially and ethnically diverse states in the nation lends itself to visions of an integrated, equitable society, factors such as the high cost of living and inequitable schools serve to paint the state's inequality upon similar racial and ethnic lines. The "common-sense" resulting from my upbringing in this context positioned Whites as more capable and accomplished than non-Whites, further reinforcing the perception of normative practices as truth.

Attempts to problematize the status-quo are complicated by the fast-paced, ultra-competitive culture of the northeastern United States which is the result of large populations crammed into limited amounts of space. The cultural fields of my upbringing located value in the unapologetic pursuit of success, which I deem the "fear of falling" discourse. I saw this all around me. Besides major holidays, my family never did eat dinner together as a whole unit because my father would work through the evening hours. Over time, I came to associate this specific action with taking care of and providing for one's family. Current New Jersey Governor Chris Christie exemplified this culture in 2014, receiving national attention after he told a heckler at a news conference to "sit down and shut up." Even after five years in Hawai'i, this

sentiment resonated with me! In order to get ahead in this sea of humanity, you have to be direct and blunt, if not loud and aggressive. Thoughtfulness is all-too-often perceived as indecisiveness, which is associated with weakness and inadequacy. The “fear of falling” proves to be a compelling notion, as falling from the middle class means becoming “poor”. To be poor implies personal failure, loss of privilege, and carries with it the shame that one has not lived up to the American Dream. As such, this cultural phenomena does not lend itself to ‘slowing down’ in order to challenge assumptions and values.

Historically, those individuals and groups who either fail to meet the expectations of – or those who flat out reject – “America’s” individualistic, capitalistic core ideology (who are unable or do not actively seek to “get ahead”) have been and continue to be perceived largely through a deficit lens as “others”. The fact that I was a history buff while growing up served to reinforce stereotypes of what constitutes the ‘right’ way to live one’s life. Examples of the negative consequences associated with not assimilating to the “American” way of life prove plentiful. My learning about the Cold War era was framed by the villainization of the opposing economic system of communism and the “reds” who supported it. A negative stigma of irresponsibility was attached to the carefree, drug-using “hippies” who embodied the counterculture movement of the 1960’s. The hidden practice of labeling White, middle-class ideals as ‘the American way’ continues to this day, producing and sustaining subjectivities that function to perpetuate the latter’s hegemonic grip on defining normative practices.

Take, for example, the well-documented and highly publicized “achievement gap” in education, which refers to the disparity in academic performance between groups of students. Most commonly, this is used to describe the troubling performance gaps in achievement between African-American and Hispanic students, at the lower end of the performance scale, and their

non-Hispanic White peers. It is also used to describe similar academic disparity between students from low-income families and those who are better off (“Understanding the Gaps”, 2015). Taken together, the narrative of the achievement gap positions White, middle to upper-class positionality as inherently superior to that of all others; White students are much better at ‘getting ahead’ as evidenced through test scores and college attendance. By shining a spotlight on the constructs of race and class without the adoption of a critical lens, the media and other social intuitions reinforce the commonly-held liberal White ideology of meritocracy. Perpetuating this “level playing field” discourse serves to legitimize Whiteness further as it also reinforces color-blind ideologies.

My socialization into the ideology of Whiteness began at birth and was reinforced through the White dominance of American cultural norms. The power of the middle-class ideology of individualism in shaping my worldview is evidenced by my initial self-perception as one who occupied an oppressed position. In locating this misperception, I introduce the conceptualization of Whiteness as an institution. As the dominant ideology, Whiteness is embedded in our social institutions – legal, economic, political, educational, religious, and media – and reinforced through discursive practices. Tate (2016) argues that these social institutions represent “a synthesis of White supremacy and White privileges in their perspective, practices, and benefits” (p. 365), also which serve to systematically favor the performances of those who possess Whiteness. Within the contexts that encapsulated my schooling experiences, the ideology of meritocracy - individuals succeed or fail due to their abilities and efforts - was rationalized and embraced. Because Whiteness as a racial construct remained hidden from my perception, I had assumed that schools were impartial environments. The norms embedded within school settings, or as I perceived them as rules and expectations, were presumed to be

racially and culturally neutral. Even though I struggled to meet these expectations, I unconsciously accepted them as justified.

My internalization of the practices of schooling as justified can be traced past the institutional narrative of meritocracy to the dominant social and political discourse of democracy. Democracy, arguably in its most ideal sense, champions a presupposed equality of persons. Democracy and meritocracy are often used synonymously or in close association with the ideas of equality and fairness. Further complicating matters, both democratic and meritocratic values undergird the ideology of the ‘American Dream’, setting the predominant narrative for the justification of success and failure. Hochschild (1995) identifies the core beliefs of the ‘American Dream’ as: (a) individuals can succeed on the basis of their autonomous decisions and actions; (b) this success is based upon moral virtue; and (c) equal opportunity applies to everyone regardless of origin or social identity. Much like Whiteness, the “American Dream” worldview was learned, eventually becoming a form taken-for-granted, embodied discourse. A critical lens highlights that such a worldview not only normalizes and naturalizes power inequalities but also shapes intentions and actions that reproduce patterns of inequality. That is, the ‘American Dream’ perspective fails to adequately acknowledge the role of privilege in success.

To put it another way, I pose a question directly to the reader: *How does one who accepts that life under a U.S. democracy is one of unmitigated equality and freedom and, at the same time, explain the severity of social stratification present in our nation?* Reflecting back upon my perceptions as an adolescent, I am aware that my response to this question would likely take the form of an argument positioning the ideology of meritocracy as justification for the social inequality in our country. This represents a logic of racism.

When I think about the ways that White privilege manifests in classrooms, I think about *both* White teachers and students. As Picower (2009) notes, resistance is common when both of these groups are confronted with racism and the historical legacy of White supremacy.

According to Picower, White teachers and students resist this new knowledge by clinging to the “Tools of Whiteness,” which the author defines as discursal instruments that are “designed to protect and maintain dominant and stereotypical understandings of race – tools that [are] emotional, ideological, and performative” (p. 197). To be more specific, the Tools of Whiteness generate from three main areas: teachers’ emotional experiences, existing dominant racial ideologies, and performances of identity. When teachers are challenged to think beyond their current White-normative ideologies, they draw from these three areas to avoid, refute, or subvert issues that would have them do otherwise. Petchauer (2009) highlights how findings such as these illustrate the important point that it is less passive resistance and more active protection that sustain dominant ideologies.

I had previously held an assumption of White teachers’ color-blindness as the result of an *inability* – passive in nature, and therefore not directly responsible for maintaining White supremacy. Anderson (2010) positions color-blindness as “inaction through denial, thereby maintaining the current power structure and preserving the privileges of the dominant group” (p. 250). Picower’s (2009) phrase “Tools of Whiteness” is particularly revealing in its own right, inferring that actions and inactions I once viewed as neutral are in fact the social mechanisms which *generate* and *perpetuate* ideologies such as White supremacy. This causes me to think about and problematize other actions besides the emotional responses of anger and defensiveness which I critiqued in the first layer of this critical analysis.

Picower (2009) suggests that silence and the promotion of the ethical, non-racist good self in teachers' discourses are used to adeptly maintain the status-quo as well. In addition, I am guilty of unknowingly maintaining and protecting Whiteness through deflection. My situation differs, though, from the commonly described discourse of politeness adopted by White teachers who promote a race-neutral perspective. In reality, I have not avoided discussing ethnicity and difference in depth with my students. In my experience and though my positionality as a White teacher, such discussions are unavoidable in certain educational contexts within Hawai'i. In private school settings, the similarity of cultural capital between students and teachers, and amongst students themselves, shields a collective perception of diversity and difference. In turn, discussions about these topics was much less common than in the context of public school. The student body at Onshore High School is especially diverse due to its proximity to a large military installation. Here, a local student population that is heavily represented by those ethnicities which fall at the bottom of Hawai'i's social hierarchy are met by a significant number of students from military families who originate from United States mainland. The local students are far more vocal and tend to dominant most aspects of the campus culture and classroom atmosphere. On the other hand, the students from military families by large exhibited a respect for authority through disciplined mannerisms.

When I initially came back to this school the second time, I encouraged discussions about critical factors such as race, ethnicity, and difference in my social studies classes. An overarching goal for this approach revolved around an ongoing effort to promote perspective-taking and empathy on behalf of all of my students because it appeared to me that both groups correlated difference with deficit. Largely, students from military backgrounds were viewed by the local student population as 'visitors' to the island and to our school. This perception was

rooted in a number of factors that included race (mixed-race but largely White), temporary resident-status (due to the military's rotation schedule), location/context (military students lived primarily on base, which was off-access to non-military personnel), and history (the U.S. government and military involvement in the overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy in 1893). During class discussions, I found it difficult to adequately protect these students from a local dialogue which at times became a discourse which I perceived to be aggressive, accusatory, threatening, and potentially harmful. I did not want this portion of the student population to feel unsafe or unwanted in class, as they did not actively choose to be in this setting and for the most part were intent on keeping a low profile. Yet simultaneously, I thought it was important that the local student population understood that they had a voice in our classroom; that they would be heard, acknowledged, and validated in this space. At first, I adjusted the structure of our discussions - Socratic seminars, philosophical discussions as part of the Philosophy for Children model of inquiry, etc. - in efforts to circumnavigate the potentiality of cultivating an abusive classroom climate. I then adjusted the assigned readings and discussion prompts, emphasizing topics instead of critical factors themselves - but which still encouraged and supported the exploration of said factors. None-the-less, on many occurrences I felt the need to re-direct - and even silence - the discourse of the 'local' students.

My perception of students' perspectives requires further examination. Was I protecting Whiteness by narrowing the possibilities for the discussion of critical elements and difference? Or, was I promoting such a discussion appropriately in accordance with the standards of professionalism? I now agree that White teachers who engage in practices which reflect a race-neutral perspective are engaging in a harmful form of *active* resistance. As Rodriguez (2009) argues, these teachers are choosing to be ignorant; they are *choosing* not to know about, or

engage in, exposing the power of Whiteness in the maintenance of structural racism. However, I have difficulty applying this perspective to the White students when taking the situational nature of context into account. If White adults are often unable to attain a perspective pertaining to their own positionality, can I reasonably expect adolescents to do so? I exposed them to this perspective, but also attempted to meet one of the core expectations of the teaching profession, which posits that all students should feel safe. As it is challenging to ‘un-learn’ what is already internalized, it is difficult to ‘un-hear’ threat or insult. I also think about the impact of role of my positionality as the haole transplant teacher on these discussions. I think about the age of these students as well. I even think about the role of the embattled head administrator and the negative school culture which resulted.

What I do understand is that it is unexamined assumptions and taken-for-granted notions that maintain complex ideologies. And the very fact that I am engaging in this ongoing praxis of critical reflection is ultimately a step in the right direction, even if the answers I desire are not readily available. In attempting to attain perspective, I locate connections to my own experience as a victim of emotional abuse. That is, there appear to be similar “Tools of Male-ness”, “Tools of Mental Disorders”, and “Tools of What Constitutes Abuse” which serve to perpetuate a number of dominant discourses which collectively marginalize a person in my positionality as the male victim of female emotional abuse. Just as I am unable to overlook or ignore the impacts of the emotional abuse I have endured, the local students who populated my classroom similarly cannot negate their experiences as ‘raced’ and ‘ethnic’. Even if I assume that the “Tools of Whiteness” (Picower, 2009) which I leveraged in this scenario were smaller in nature – think of my redirection and silencing actions within the discussion of critical elements and difference as ‘nails’ or ‘screws’ instead of major tools such as ‘hammers’ or ‘screwdrivers’ – they are still

fundamental units that make sophisticated and towering structures resist forces that might alter them. Paulo Freire reminds us that oppression dehumanizes both the oppressed and the oppressor. It is this sentiment which drives to continue chipping away at my Whiteness.

In his investigation of White teachers' discursive methods of addressing the topic race in their classrooms, Castagno (2008) describes how the teachers in his study regularly conflated "culture with race... equality with equity... and difference with deficit" (p. 326) in their discussions of students, teaching, and education. This conflation can be directly attributed to the liberal ideologies of meritocracy, colorblindness, and the 'American Dream'. It is within the blurred boundaries between these concepts that Whiteness is reified. Lewis (2001) adds, "in schools, ideologies of meritocracy based on the belief that individuals succeed or fail according to their own merit help both students and professionals 'understand' why some excel and others flounder [Apple, 1990; MacLeod, 1995]" (p. 799). The danger of ideologies lie in their foundations; ideologies are built upon kernels of truth. In this case, educational attainment is something that individuals must work hard to achieve. Yet one of the unearned privileges to being of the middle-class is that many of your internalized class values also align to the middle-class values that have shaped and govern our educational systems. Schools are places that create and perpetuate an educational culture in which inequities are ignored, the status quo is maintained, and where Whiteness is both protected and entrenched (Castagno, 2008). The emphasis placed upon these norms and values served to position them in order of significance. For example, despite my academic struggles, teachers often described me as polite, kind, and respectful. The embodiment of these qualities proved largely irrelevant; the primary emphasis was placed on academic success. These qualities, as I perceive them now, are associated with the norm and therefore were not celebrated: they were *expected*. In sum, if one attained excellent

grades, he or she could get away with possessing a negative attitude or disposition. However, the absence of a reciprocal relationship demonstrated what mattered most. After all, being kind and respectful does not ‘pay the bills’. This sentiment makes complete sense in a context where *who you are* is equated to the accumulation of *what you have*.

Through schooling, the ideology of meritocracy was rationalized and emphasized, which served to further entrench the ideology of individualism in my unconsciousness. In addition, the ideology of meritocracy cultivated within me the very racist perspective which I aimed to identify in this vignette analysis. This racist perspective is born from an uncritical acceptance of meritocracy and its embedded justification of disadvantage as non-racial. Through this lens, those who occupied disadvantaged positions in society were deserving of their roles. Their circumstance reflected a lack of effort or ability on their behalf. When this internalized perspective is combined with the contextual reality of New Jersey as described previously, Whiteness becomes entrenched as ‘good’. When I think about the White teachers who adhere to the colorblind perspective, I also think about how this is not so much a *conscious* choice as it is the result of a gradual process of White racialization. Inferring that the perspective an absolute choice infers that White people possess an awareness of themselves as racialized beings. I have demonstrated that this is not a commonality. However, I no longer position these teachers – of which I was a member – as innocent or neutral. Having become aware of how a White “blindness” to understanding racialization plays a significant role in the maintenance of White hegemony was not enough – because “White hegemony” means little to one who is unaware of the impact of their race to begin with. It was when critical reflection re-positioned this blindness as a form of active, purposeful resistance to knowing itself that a new perception began to resonate. During this process, “White hegemony” came to life, taking the form of my own direct

and indirect actions – the “Tools of Whiteness” (Picower, 2009) which functioned both inside and outside of the classroom.

It is interesting how it is almost second nature for those who share my former positionality – prior to critical reflection - scoff at the very thought that we fiercely defend our White privilege. Further, we become angry and defensive – if not worse - when we are informed that said privilege is damaging to others. And God forbid if someone has the gall to deem us “racist” – now we will jump in any number of directions to discredit you. Shortly after I had become aware of the nature of my abuse, I sat down with my best friend over a beer one evening. It had been a rough few months – to say the very least - and more than anything, I wanted him to understand that my actions and more commonly, inactions, during this time period were not related to him. He deserved that, I assumed. This person had actually met the woman who would later be my girlfriend well before I did, and it was through their loose friendship that she and I met. Having known him for years, I felt comfortable describing what I had learned. He scoffed at me. Discredited and blamed me. He was the first person I told this to, and would be one of the last as well. He did not do this on purpose, as he assumed that I was instead just heartbroken and needed a push to move forward. Quoting the famous dictum from poet John Lyly's 1579 novel “Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit,” he argued “All is fair in love and war”. This phrase is used often to justify bad behavior. During this delicate period of my recovery, his act of invalidation set me back for quite a while.

But as I reflect upon my learning and growth since that evening, I cannot help but wonder about the survival instincts which inform the way humans process and remember information, solve problems, and, and make decisions. Daniel Kahneman, a psychologist who won the 2002 Nobel Prize for Economics, calls these instincts “cognitive biases”. That is, they do not always

result in the most accurate or best outcomes, but they are most *efficient* in terms of time and energy expenditure (Holt, 2011). In other words, they are ‘good enough’ for our survival. As I reflect on my experience, and the experience of the “Other”, I wonder how much these instincts are actually *failing* us. Humans today inhabit a thoroughly modern world of space exploration and virtual realities... and we do so with the ingrained mentality of Stone Age hunter-gatherers. The complexity of life has evolved as technological advancements have changed our individual, social, and work lives. The notion of ‘survival’ has dramatically changed since humans’ earliest days as well. Today’s ‘threats’ are also significantly unlike those of the past - they are neither immediate, foreseeable, or understandable. They are also much less controllable. In sum, the humans are born with ancient instincts that are counterproductive in aiding ‘survival’ as it applies to our advanced society. A growing population and limited resources position survival today as equality, cooperation, empathy, and compassion.

CHAPTER 5

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Introduction

In *The White Album* (1990), Joan Didion famously wrote “We tell ourselves stories in order to live”. At face value, it appears that Didion suggests the meanings which people make out of their encounters in life, and the subsequent stories that we construct, are directly related to the stories we have previously told ourselves about life. We tell ourselves stories not only for profound reasons but for ordinary, routine ones as well: to understand the complex and equivocal events that unfold everyday all around us. Our lived experiences form a lens that uniquely represents how each of us has come to know the world. Our stories reflect how we *know* that world. As a society we regard our elders as wise, correlating more experience with more knowledge and good judgment.

To those of you who are contemplating beginning an autoethnographic journey of your own, I would like to share the most helpful piece of advice that I received. When it came time to begin “doing” autoethnography, I found myself overwhelmed. With so many definitions and descriptions of the genre located in the professional literature, I did not know where to begin. What was my theoretical framework? What were the problems that would demonstrate a need for my study? How did I plan to analyze and present my data? I was essentially working backwards; too stubborn to listen to the best piece of advice I received from a committee member early in the process.

“Just write your stories, Nick.”

At its core, autoethnography is quite simple: *telling stories*. As autoethnographers, we heed Didion’s call. We tell our stories to live and live *better*; our stories allow us to lead more

reflective, more meaningful, and more just lives. Jones, Adams & Ellis (2016) explain, “In practice, autoethnography is not so much a methodology as a way of life. It is a way of life that acknowledges contingency, finitude, embeddedness in storied being, encounters with Otherness, an appraisal of ethical and moral commitments, and a desire to keep conversation going” (p. 53).

When I first embarked on this journey of discovering who I am, I did not feel empowered. I felt like I had no control over the various structures which framed my day-to-day being. Further, and adding to this sense of confusion, I was unaware of the mere existence of many of these structures. However, I made a decree that I would investigate the visible and invisible forces which served to shape the subjectivities which I embodied. Chang (2008) explains:

The “forces” that shape people’s sense of self include nationality, religion, gender, education, ethnicity socioeconomic class, and geography. Understanding “the forces” also helps them examine their preconceptions and feelings about others, whether they are “others of similarity”, “others of difference,” or even “other of opposition”. (p. 52)

To put it another way, I made a decision to understand how I construct myself, and my stories, as an educator, theorizing that knowing myself might uncover more specific ways that I might combat this feeling of powerlessness. My own questions regarding who I was years ago, along with who I am constantly becoming, in the effort of reclaiming an empowered status as an educator, fueled my journey to construct, deconstruct, and reconstruct self. Through this study, I have come to discover more about myself than I even knew existed. Within the process of constructing my stories, I located the origin of my identities first in my daily experience as an

educator, where my past experiences as a teacher and my future goals in terms of teaching and learning influence who I am, constantly.

As such, my personal stories were born out of wanting to know more about myself as an educator in hopes that this discernment would affect my teaching practice. My work allowed me to explore and understand how my storytelling aided in the process of constructing my professional identities. I have appreciated what autoethnography has allowed me to do with critical reflexivity. I am proud of myself for engaging and sustaining autoethnography in a way that has allowed me to undertake the difficult and vulnerable journey of self-discovery. Sharing my stories, and being transparent, was most difficult but by bearing myself, I have been able to address and enhance some of the anxieties associated with the duties of being an educator.

Summary of the Study

Overview of the Problem

The research problem driving this study relates to the powerful lesson I described above. Teacher identity has emerged as a topic amongst contemporary researchers to enlighten, impact, and reform professional practice in light of the unique challenges within the complex context of 21st century education in the United States in response to the implications of the unprecedented racial, ethnic, socio economic, religious, and linguistic heterogeneity of America's current student population for schools and, more importantly, classroom teachers. The public school student population in the United States is projected to increase in diversity. This cultural mosaic within the U.S. classrooms has spurred a growing challenge to meeting the needs of these students (Delano-Oriaran & Meidl, 2013). While the demographics of the nation's student population have changed considerably, however, the same is not true of the teacher population, which has remained overwhelmingly White and middle class.

In sum, an increasingly homogeneous teaching population must address a demographic and cultural divide amongst students, teachers, families, as well as curriculum and instruction (Gay & Howard, 2001). Concurrently, teachers must function within the context of an educational climate characterized by increased standardization and accountability measures in an effort to bridge the abysmal achievement gap among racial, cultural, and linguistic groups and their White, middle-class counterparts (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Sleeter & Stillman, 2005). As such, the teachers' time is too often taken up with preparing students for such measures. Clearly, our schools not adequately met the challenge faced by the increasing diversity of the student population. This is reason enough to analyze what can be done to prepare teachers and other educators to be successful with students of diverse backgrounds.

Teachers from mainstream sociocultural backgrounds barely notice this sacrifice of their students, and even if they do, it is likely they believe they are helping the student, even while they are imposing their cultural construction upon the student (Romano, 2014). According to Shannon (1992; as cited in Degener, 2001, p. 31), all of the decisions that educators make regarding program and lesson goals, the materials to be used, and the nature of teacher interaction with students "[...] are actually negotiations over whose values, interests, and beliefs will be validated at school" (p. 2). Students of ethnic, racialized, or low income backgrounds are forced to learn discrete knowledge that has little relevance for them, and which, in fact, ignores their cultures and contributions. Romano (2014) sums it up best, asserting that for some young people, "...school lessons are to give up who they are and become enculturated to the ways of the school" (p. 69).

In order for teachers to be effective in such a climate of layered and complex diversity, they must become reflexive educators capable of questioning their own attitudes, thought

process, values, assumptions, prejudices and habitual actions and subsequently assessing their impact on their lives and their views of the world (Banks, 2001; Starr, 2010). In light of the represented multiplicity of difference in American classrooms, Britzman (1991; as cited in Starr, 2010, p. 1) described the process of becoming a teacher as one of biographical crisis, involving more than "... applying decontextualized skills or of mirroring predetermined images; it is a time when one's past, present and future are set in dynamic tension" (p. 31). Such a conflict requires that educators adopt a critical position towards the social relations created within difference. Understanding one's identity proves integral for adopting such a critical position. Starr (2010) explains:

Through the interrogation of one's identity and the locations and interactions pivotal in the formation of identity, the result is increased consciousness and "conscientising of social positioning" (Hickey & Austin, 2007, p. 24). This awareness makes teachers better equipped to help students become "thoughtful, caring and reflective in a multicultural world society" (Banks, 2001, p. 5)

The current situation requires teachers who are deeply sensitive to the sociopolitical and economic environment in which we are educating our children (Gay, 2003). That is, educators must develop a *critical consciousness* - the social process of questioning one's assumptions about reality (Freire, 1973, 2008) as well as active participation in the critique of knowledge production (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this inquiry:

1. What are the significant social, cultural, historical, and political forces in Hawai‘i that have shaped my personal and professional identity formation?
2. How does my positionality as a haole “transplant” in Hawai‘i impact my personal beliefs, values, assumptions, and ultimately the development of a critical consciousness?
3. How do my multiple identities interface with the ethnographic characteristics of the schools where I have taught?
4. How do my personal and professional roles influence my teaching identity?
5. What can we learn from my study that can be used to by others in order to become successful teachers in Hawai‘i?

Review of Methodology

An autoethnographic methodology informed this critical inquiry into the historically constituted subjectivities, cultural meanings, social dynamics, and discourses that have ultimately shaped my teaching identity. As a form of narrative writing that invites the reader into the cultural experiences of the writer, an autoethnographic approach opened up a space to explore the impact of the social, cultural, historical, and political forces in Hawai‘i on the personal, professional, and situated dimensions of my identity. Taken together, these dimensions serve to inform my teacher identity. The research questions which frame this inquiry are exploratory by design, representing a correlation to the ongoing, dynamic, non-linear nature of this investigation into understanding the extent to which my life has been governed – or perhaps distorted – by these forces. The emergent nature of this investigation positions the act of inquiry itself as the catalyst for a methodological design aimed at facilitating a holistic exploration of my teacher identity.

A multi-paradigmatic approach was adopted to frame this inquiry. I drew primarily upon the philosophical underpinnings of the critical-constructivist paradigm of qualitative research as the primary theoretical perspective for a study in which the purpose naturally shifts as meaning is created and recreated. Initial acts of autoethnographic inquiry served a sense making purpose; through the construction of self-narratives about selected critical incidents I came to understand and make meaning of lived-experience. This purpose reflects the tenants of the constructivist paradigm of qualitative research. As autoethnography takes the form of an ongoing interpretive process, the generation of data occurred simultaneously with analysis and interpretation. Incidentally, the construction of my self-narratives also represented acts uncritical reflection – each filled with the hidden, deeply entrenched beliefs, values, assumptions, which frame unexamined ideologies. Adopting an analytical lens of the critical paradigm served to foster the examination of my own cultural perspectives as a member of the dominant society. In implementing a critical approach to autoethnography, I examined myself in a systematic and transparent way. In adopting a critical orientation to frame this autoethnographic inquiry, I drew from the rationale of Madison (2005), who argues that critical inquiry seeks:

...to articulate and identify hidden forces and ambiguities that operate beneath appearances; to guide judgments and evaluations emanating from our discontent; to direct our attention to the critical expressions within different interpretive communities relative to their unique symbol systems, customs, and codes; to demystify the ubiquity and magnitude of power; to provide insight and inspire acts of justice; and to name and analyze what is intuitively felt. (p. 13)

A central dimension of the critical-constructivist paradigm involves gaining awareness of ourselves as social, cultural, and historical beings. By adopting a critical-constructivist perspective, I sought to understand the *forces* that construct knowledge - believing that a virtual reality shaped by power and historical forces influence co-constructed realities (Guba & Lincoln, 2005) I engaged this perspective with narrative research/inquiry as embodied within the autoethnographic methodology. The genre of narrative inquiry, in turn, lends itself to a poststructuralist analytical influence because of the significant attention that this paradigm places upon the linguistic and narrative structure of knowledge due to a belief that meanings are produced and realities are created through language (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). The poststructuralist perspective served to enhance critical reflexivity during analyses.

My theoretical framework provided the lens through which I reflexively analyzed my evolution as an educator. Critical autoethnography sat at the core of the framework, as critical reflection served as the catalyst for analysis. A triad of tools from the Critical Race Theory toolkit constitutes the framework. Theories of intersectionality, cultural capital, and critical Whiteness studies were integrated into an ongoing praxis through which I explored, interpreted, scrutinized, and explained my actions, behaviors, and decisions within the larger cultural contexts of this study. In telling the stories, many identities were reinterpreted and thus were transformed, or had their meanings changed within their social and cultural contexts.

Limitations

This study is limited in its scope to the viewpoints and experiences related to teacher's educational career in New Jersey and Hawai'i. This research is autobiographical in nature and limited to the observations and interpretations of shared encounters and interactions with colleagues in educational settings where I have worked as well as 'Others' in society where I

have lived. While self-study can be a transformative experience for educators, it does not often impact policy – and without a clear line of inquiry within and the continual building off other studies, it will continue to fail to do so (Zeichner, 2007).

Summary of Findings

What are the significant social, cultural, historical, and political forces in Hawai‘i that have shaped my personal and professional identity formation?

Strings of intersecting social, cultural, historical and political forces flow through all four of my vignettes. Collectively, these forces illustrate how the nuanced nature of Hawai‘i’s cultural and ethnic perspective complicates the identity formation process. An examination of these discourses begins with a discussion of the historical forces from which Hawai‘i’s racialized ‘local’, ‘non-local’ and ‘haole’ identity markers emerge. The ‘haole’ identity sits in contrast to that of ‘local’ identity and culture, which is inclusive of the indigenous Native-Hawaiian population as well as those ethnicities brought to Hawai‘i during the second half of the 19th century by haole plantation owners as a source of labor. These ethnicities include, but are not limited to, individuals of Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, Portuguese and Korean decent. This insight sheds light on how ‘local’ identity in Hawai‘i works by exclusion; it is often defined by what it is *not*, what it is in opposition to, or who cannot participate in it (Wheeler, 2014). In this sense, the construction of a ‘local’ identity can be traced back over 200 years in history to the period of U.S. colonialism and foreign domination which saw the subjugation of Native Hawaiians and exploitation of Asian workers as a source of cheap labor. At its core, ‘local’ identity stands in opposition to the beliefs and values embedded within the White supremacist ideology of the ‘oppressive’ haoles of this era. This identity construct has evolved as a result of pivotal events such as when American and European businessmen, backed by U.S. military

forces, overthrew Hawai‘i’s monarch in 1893 and placed her under house arrest two years later. The United States annexed the islands as a territory in 1898, and Hawai‘i became a state in 1959. Emerging from this historical narrative is a racialized identity discourse, which equates all haoles into one group characterized by a colonial past, capitalism, racism, militarism, and globalization (Ohnuma, 2002). The nature of this discourse is oppressive as it serves to signify my cultural outsider positionality through perpetuating a belief that one can ‘look’ local. While the racialization embedded within identity politics in Hawai‘i is by no means a concrete rule, the color of my skin is the first thing that is observed by others – shaping impressions and expectations that have real impacts on personal and professional identity.

The impact of this historical force in shaping identity is evident in “The Technical Teacher”. Today, a dominant cultural discourse reflects the divide between ‘haole’ and ‘local’ by assigning “local” identity to individuals who embody the Polynesian and Asian values and interactional styles of generations of Hawai‘i residents (Reed, 2006). In Hawai‘i, cultural differences “align Asian and Pacific Island groups in collective contrast to U.S. mainland values and interactive styles” (Reed, 2001, p. 197). In this regard, one can also *act* local. The sense of pan-ethnicity which results from this cultural discourse of ‘local’ homogeneity shielded from my perception the vast inequality within ethnicity in Hawai‘i. According to Okamura (2008), in addition to its role as the primary structural principle of social relations in Hawai‘i, ethnicity is also “...an organizing principle in the allocation of socioeconomic status” (p. 43).

Socioeconomically dominant groups in Hawai‘i include Japanese-American, Chinese-Americans, and Whites, while socioeconomically subordinate groups including Native Hawaiians, Filipino-Americans, Samoans, other Pacific Islanders, Puerto Ricans, and Southeast Asians (Okamura, 2008). The ‘black and white’ nature of the racialized identity discourse

prevented me from acknowledging the gap in cultural capital between the students in this public school context and myself.

Hawai‘i’s popular discourses of ethnic humor and stereotyping produce and sustain the socioeconomic inequality within ethnicity. Ethnic groups are ‘typed’ - ‘the rich haoles’, ‘the lazy, poor, Hawaiians’, ‘the obedient, intelligent Japanese’ and ‘the stupid Portuguese’ being common examples of stereotypes which have become naturalized and largely go unquestioned. Tenchini and Frigerio (2016) note that stereotypes, whether perceived or real, are generally seen not as offensive by locals, but as humorous ways to celebrate cultural differences. I can see how my experiences in private school settings in Hawai‘i (regardless of positive or negative), such as those described in “Where’s the Old Nick” and “The Incessant Conversation”, reflect a convergence of these forces. The East-Asian and White ethnicities situated at the top of Hawai‘i’s social hierarchy are overrepresented in Hawai‘i’s expensive independent school settings. Within these contexts, students and teachers are more likely to embrace the dominant middle-class cultural beliefs and values embedded within the institution of schooling because these reflect the same cultural knowledge and skills that are embedded in their dominant-group status. To put it another way, students and teachers are more likely to share a preference for the same cultural capital in these settings.

However, the popular cultural discourses which homogenize ‘local’ and veil ethnic inequality led to an internalization on my behalf of the East-Asian and White of students in Hawai‘i as more capable than others with regards to achieving success in educational settings. I am now aware that these students possessed the ‘right’ beliefs and values with regards to the dominant cultural capital which parallels that which is embedded in schooling as it has been institutionalized. Upon transitioning back to a public school setting, as described in “The

Technical Teacher”, I was clearly too busy attempting to superimpose my privileged worldview upon my ‘deficient’ students to understand how an institutional discourse in the form of the ‘hidden curriculum’ functions within the educational system. The institutionalized culture of schooling privileges a specific standard of ‘being’ and ‘living’ which did not coincide with the ways these students lived in their cultural communities. In order to succeed, students are required to conform to a set of middle class norms, values, attitudes, beliefs and ideologies which remained significantly hidden from my perception as anything other than universal guidelines for success. I viewed these students through a deficient-lens, unable to truly recognize the existence of their cultural strengths as ‘strengths’ at all because they appeared to contradict numerous institutional expectations. The conflicts arising from the cultural disconnect in this classroom had significant impacts on my personal and professional identity due to a held perception which conflated conflict with failure.

As detailed in “Colorblind”, I lacked a sense of self within my own culture before arriving in Hawai‘i, deriving my self-worth solely from production, performance, and achievement. In this regard, I conflated the personal, professional, and situated dimensions of my identity into a single domain in which my professional identity informed all other aspects of self. This is not uncommon of adults who experienced emotional abuse as children. I unknowingly chose to become a ‘workaholic’ because my performance had been the only avenue I had ever been taught to define myself. In my role as the family ‘scapegoat’, I was blamed as the reason why certain people were *forced* to act in an abusive way and had internalized deep shame and guilt as a result of my deficiencies. The discourses of the dominant American culture reflected the beliefs and values of my own White, middle-class positionality. After all, my very own European ancestors were a large part of the grand narratives of meritocracy and individualism,

which in turn led to a seemingly natural acceptance of a colorblind ideology. This ideology was packaged as a powerful theme of “American” cultural history – not as a means of perpetuating White supremacy. As with many teachers from dominant cultural backgrounds (White, middle class teachers in the United States), my own culture was something that I was not immediately aware of because it fit so seamlessly with prevailing opinions, beliefs, values, and expectations about behavior, education, and life choices.

My internalization of the powerful discourse of meritocracy led to my belief that positioned schools as neutral environments. For *all* Americans in school, I assumed, there was a certain way to *be*, to *act*, to *react*... there was a certain way to *live*. Teachers bring themselves—their life experiences, histories, and cultures—into the classroom. The situated and professional dimensions of my teacher identity informed my assumptions and beliefs about what a ‘good’ teacher is and does as well as what constituted ‘good’ learning. Political forces, in the form of macro level policy discourses reflecting a neoliberal national reform agenda, reinforced these beliefs. This policy-driven agenda emphasizes ‘standards’ for teachers, students, and administrators, in addition to high stakes, mass standardized testing and common curriculum frameworks. It also emphasizes ‘transparent’ comparisons between schools (and teachers) in the interests of accountability, competition, and ‘choice’. As described in “The Incessant Conversation”, the social discourse of the ‘Master Narrative’ emerges at the intersection of this educational policy and the larger cultural discourses of meritocracy and individuals, positioning public schools in Hawai‘i as deficient in comparison to private schools. My professional identity was significantly impacted by the ‘Master Narrative’. Public schools in Hawai‘i, I believed, were deficient. And yet I found myself back in a public school setting after my teacher burn out in a

private school setting. In addition, the embarrassment I felt, as well as the lower self-worth, impacted my personal identity in a negative manner.

The institutionalized culture of schooling represents a structure of power because of the multiple systems that operate in or around it. In line with this research question, I term these ‘outside forces’ and ‘inside forces’. The imposed power of top-down directives resulting from neoliberal educational reform measures represents a political force which impacted my professional identity. The impacts associated with the discourse of federally mandated educational policy can be located in how the power differential interacted with the micro level pressures of teaching and learning at the school and classroom levels. Although essentialist, context-blind policy measures have been deeply embedded within our nation’s educational system for decades, these hierarchical structures are not hidden. Instead, what is hidden is how these hierarchical structures - which originate in dominant ideologies – create barriers for supporting critically minded teachers. Unexamined, the dominant ideologies which inform the use of high-stakes testing measures and other accountability metrics promote assimilationist practices which veil how such competitive measures legitimize the way U.S. society is organized. That is, efforts to close the achievement gap through top-down measures aimed at ensuring equity for all students are fundamentally flawed because they are constructed upon a misguided and outdated conceptualization of citizenship which does not reflect the current trend of increasing diversity which characterizes our student population.

Banks (2008) points out the continuing challenge for multicultural nation-states to balance unity and diversity; unity without diversity has resulted in the current hegemony and oppression that exists today. Banks identifies the major problem facing the United States as “how to recognize and legitimize difference and yet construct an overarching national identity

that incorporates the voices, experiences, and hopes of the diverse groups that compose it” (p. 133). The ‘outside forces’ of lawmakers, parents, organizations, etc. continue to perpetuate a discourse of blame on students, teachers, and others at the individual school level for the failure of top-down policy measures to meet intended goals. On the contrary, those at the school level are actually the victims of external directives whose objectives contradict their very purpose of maintaining a status-quo which continues to marginalize the very students that policy aims to empower. This is essentially a colorblind approach; and while equalizing educational outcomes is an admirable goal, framing such efforts as if students’ racial, ethnic and socio-cultural backgrounds do not matter in this process is problematic given our history of racial inequality and our understanding of the role of culture, which is highly non-standardized across (and within) racial/ethnic groups. Today, I am liberal minded enough to ‘blame the system’ instead. A critical gaze upon the economy, violence in society, a lack of social services, etc. reveals the roots of the educational inequality that schools are supposed to remedy. The authentic sense of personal agency from the internalization of this truth is significant enough – there exist a plethora of research upon the strategies teachers can leverage at a classroom level. To identify all of these would be beyond the scope of this research project.

Power is imposed upon teachers through bureaucratic and political mechanisms which establish what it means to be an ‘effective teacher’. Institutionalized policy discourses were reinforced through teacher evaluation measures promoted as more ‘democratic’ because criteria are weighted amongst various accountability measures tied to student growth and classroom observations – not just test scores. The sheer amount of power embedded within policy discourse and its dispersal limited the possibility for teacher subjectivities. Upon review of the classroom observation criteria and template, I instinctively pushed back. There was *too much*; I was not

upset by the plethora of knowledge, abilities, and skills that I was expected to demonstrate, nor about the policy-driven student expectations which these reflected. The rigidity of the institutionalized framework within which my value as an educator would be determined sat in opposition to the accumulated knowledge that I had attained through my diverse experience and doctoral studies pertaining to what constituted ‘good’ teaching. The expectation that I would even be able to demonstrate the sheer volume of criterion – much less the quality with which I would do so – in a single, forty-five minute class period did not reflect the contextual realities of my day-to-day experience. Ultimately, this would serve to disrupt my situational identity. The manner by which professionalism is represented by a pre-determined set of attributes within a rigid structure strips teachers of power and in my experience chipped away at my sense of agency and resiliency.

It is here that the brunt impact of an additional system of oppression is located. As described in “The Technical Teacher”, decades of chronic underfunding by the state legislature have left Hawai‘i’s public school system deficient in a variety of categories. Schools rely on funding for hiring personnel, building and maintaining facilities, and providing equipment. Instead, teachers and students must overcome overcrowded and hot classrooms, outdated resources, and insufficient or damaged equipment. This structural inequality directly impacts the socioeconomically subordinate ethnic groups - Native Hawaiians, Filipino Americans, Latinos, Samoans, and other Pacific Islanders – who comprise a majority of our state’s public school student population. Although my principal acknowledged my concern, she explained how our school was in the process of attempting to hire an extra administrator solely to relieve those currently working with the time consuming observation process. She literally did not have time to conduct an additional observation, even if she desired to do so. In sum, public school teachers

must navigate large groups of students whose identities fail to match policymakers' 'norms' within a system where power dynamics operate in way that significantly *impose*.

Significantly different perceptions of professionalism have formed as a result of this bureaucratic system. Marked disparities in how the concept is understood places teachers in a position of uncertainty and conflict and creates the need for self-protective behaviours on their part. This diminishes the ways in which they commit themselves to the responsibilities of teaching. This erosion of commitment to teaching has direct implications for teacher effectiveness and student learning. For teachers navigating these obstacles, the need to structure the learning environment is sometimes equated with *controlling* student behavior. From an ecological perspective, classrooms are crowded spaces in which many things happen at the same time, sometimes unexpectedly, and within the gaze of many onlookers. Teachers need to manage space, time, learning resources, learning activities, assessments, people, etc. A type of teacher folklore has become naturalized as a result; this shared wisdom consists of advice to *be consistent; make things interesting; focus on the immediate and tangible; keep 'em busy; be tough early*. These key 'rules' about how to respond to student behavior become normalized and are expected as teachers' respond to accountability pressures by increasing their levels of surveillance, increasing demands for behavioral compliance, reducing student choice, and increasing their use of teacher-directed, didactic teaching methods that rely on high levels of teacher control.

I understand how these rules lead to deficit thinking in the form of shared explanations of student behavior through which we attribute blame to perceived deficiencies in the student, and/or family. Students were often described as 'lazy', 'naughty', 'oppositional', 'poorly disciplined', 'inattentive', 'violent', or 'bad'. With teacher evaluation still tied to external policy-

driven measures, options for teaching and learning are limited and do not reflect the alternative collectivist capital significantly embodied by this specific demographic of the student population. Lack of awareness of these norms and pressures to assimilate keep teachers subject to contextual forces, robbing them of agency, creativity, and voice. The lens through which I understood learning was remarkably similar to the manner by which my parents assumed that my mediocre grades as an adolescent were due to *choice* as opposed to *ability*. This led to conflict in the classroom on a regular basis. From an intersectionality perspective, I have become aware of the effect of social class, ethnicity, and context on the perception of race in Hawai‘i. When Nalu referred to his disdain for my ‘White’ way of teaching, he was referring to more than just my skin color. Through his lens, being ‘White’ meant the embodiment of the middle class norms of individualism to which he did not wish to conform.

‘The myth of normalcy’ (Britzman, 1998) is a dominant discourse perpetuated by society which shaped the potentiality for subjectivities as an educator. Framing teaching as a “relatively uncomplicated...culturally and socially uncontroversial professional choice” (Alsup, 2006, p. 63), this discourse denies teacher emotionality during an era of schooling in which “competing forces of regulation, deregulation, professionalization in education, as well as technological advancement, are continually changing what it means to teach and be a teacher” (Hallman & Burdick, 2015, p. 53). Instead, it positions a pervasive view of the teaching life as ‘known’ and ‘predictable’; a profession selected by ‘average’ people who wish to maintain a ‘stable’ or ‘regular’ life and live in middle-class contexts. As I described in “Where’s the Old Nick”, a hidden reinforcing discourse framed by the dominant Euro-American middle-class values associated with my cultural upbringing further exacerbated my teacher-burnout experience while serving at Offshore Academy. This cultural force positioned my understanding of identity as

‘what one does’ for a living as opposed to ‘who one is’ as a person. The preoccupation with upward mobility demonstrates an adherence to the middle-class ideology of individualism, which ultimately held significantly more influence over my beliefs, values, and perceptions than I previously assumed prior to engaging in this critical praxis. Within this ideology, rationality was taught to be the basis for decision making and major guide for behavioral norms. The emphasis placed upon the rational self rendered emotionality problematic - something to be managed, controlled, and disciplined (Jung, 2007). Adding the Hawai‘i-specific discourse of the ‘master narrative’ into the mix crystallized within me a belief that I was wrong to be angry or frustrated with regards to the unethical treatment I had received in this private school setting. Private school teachers were supposed to embody specific subjectivities that reflected their elite status; these were in line with the institutional and societal expectation that teachers be intelligent, kind, caring, nurturing, patient, and rational individuals. To identify my emotions in order to work through them meant adopting a subjectivity in contrast to those allowed by the dominant discourses, as well as to position myself at the will of the power embedded within them.

The political force of underfunding from the state legislature intersected other forces as well, impacting my identity. During the construction of “The Technical Teacher”, I became aware a startling statistic that I had not critically reflected upon prior. When adjusted for the cost of living, Hawai‘i’s public school teacher salaries are the lowest in the United States. New Jersey, on the other hand, has consistently ranked amongst the top five in this category. This spurred thought about what it means to be a ‘teacher’ in and through each context. The low salary of public school teachers in Hawai‘i influences the ‘master narrative’ and ultimately reinforces the low social position of this status. The very fact that I was back in public school resulted in a negative self-perception and damaging impacts on my professional identity. The

conflicts which seemingly occurred on a daily basis from my efforts to prepare students for policy-mandated assessments tied to my employment status further damaged this identity. As evident in “Where’s the Old Nick”, these forces served to reinforce stereotypes on my behalf which took the form of a deficit view of certain ethnicities in Hawai‘i as well as the public school system in general. An additional example can be located in “The Incessant Conversation”, where the mother of my then-girlfriend referred to my private school teaching position as a “real job” as compared to my work in public school settings. Internalized guilt and shame - impacts of emotional abuse from my childhood - hindered my sense of agency and prevented the attainment of intercultural competence throughout all of the vignettes in this dissertation.

How does my positionality as a haole “transplant” in Hawai‘i impact my personal beliefs, values, assumptions, and ultimately the pursuit of critical consciousness?

The answer to this question lies embedded within relationships of power and positionality. It proves beneficial to break up the term ‘haole transplant’ into each of its individual components in order to best demonstrate the complicated nature of identity formation in Hawai‘i . While growing up in New Jersey, I was a White guy; a Caucasian. I possessed a limited grasp of my own cultural awareness. Whiteness meant little to me at the time; a racial identity so bland and void of meaning that it was rarely spoken of. *Boring*. White privilege was so woven into the unexamined institutional practices, habits of mind, and received truths that it had become invisible to me as an American of the dominant race and culture. Although I entered the teaching profession with good intentions rooted in a desire to empower young people and support their navigation of the social and emotional obstacles which hindered my growth as an adolescent, like most White teachers I lacked a clear understanding of the White dominance, White power, and White privilege in which American education is deeply rooted. Unbeknownst

to me, I became a ‘haole’ upon stepping off the plane in Hawai‘i a decade ago. Moving to Hawai‘i was a *choice*; adopting a haole identity was not. I was unaccustomed and unaware of the effects of having one’s racial identity defined by others (Ladson-Billings, 1994). I argue here that although racialized identity politics in Hawai‘i prevent this from being a *choice*, this does not negate the *responsibility* that White educators in Hawai‘i have to embrace this positionality. That day marked the beginning of an ongoing journey of racial self-discovery and through this critical inquiry, a process of reinvention.

The label of ‘transplant’ is applied to those who move to Hawai‘i from elsewhere, specifically the U.S. mainland. Essentially, transplants are *settlers*. The term "transplant" suggests in itself that something foreign is placed into an already existing context. In the medical field, transplant rejection occurs when the recipient's immune system - which protects us from substances that may be harmful, such as germs, poisons, or cancer cells - attacks the transplanted organ or tissue. When a person receives an organ from someone else during transplant surgery, that person's immune system may very well recognize that it is foreign. This is because the person's immune system detects that the organs are different or not ‘matched’. Doctors almost always use medicines to suppress the immune system of the recipient so that the transplant has time to sync up with its new context. In the long run, the primary goal is to have the transplant function in sync with the rest of the body. The very nature of a transplant further suggests that ultimately, its presence should represent an improvement for its new context overall. This analogy summarizes the how my positionality as a haole transplant living and teaching in multiple contexts within Hawai‘i ultimately impacted the negotiation of my personal beliefs, values, and assumptions in a manner has led to the pursuit of critical consciousness.

Labrador's (2004) insight regarding the relationality and situatedness of 'local' provides an excellent frame for my response: "Depending on sociohistorical context and actors involved, Local can index racialized bodies ('look' Local), cultural identities ('act' Local), linguistic affiliations ('talk' Local) and political positionings" (p. 291). Hawai'i's racialized identity politics represent the primary force through which I experienced being an 'Other' in society. Although cultural differences can be hidden from others, differences of race cannot. Occupying a cultural outsider positionality proved inevitable Hawai'i, a location where Whiteness does not enjoy the comforts of invisibility as it does in the U.S. mainland. To the contrary, my haole transplant positionality was activity *contested* and informed a number of critical incidents which crossed all dimensions of identity. These emotionally charged incidents – both direct and subtle – forced me to re-think my narratives. For example, my first 'local' girlfriend hesitated for months in allowing me to meet her parents. As describe in "The Incessant Conversation", her family was of East-Asian decent and high socioeconomic means. In order to gain their trust and respect, I felt the need to unfasten my haole transplant identity by attaining a job at an elite private school and subsequently through furthering my education in order to achieve this goal. This was one of the initial times when I genuinely felt like an outsider. Although there had been prior instances where I experienced the similar negative stigma which results from the racialization of identity in Hawai'i – such as random occurrences when I called a "Fucking haole" by locals when surfing different breaks around the island where I lived – these were not taken as personal because no previous relationship existed between myself and these individuals.

As described in "The Technical Teacher", conflicts relating to my haole and/or transplant status were more frequent in the public school settings where I served as a teacher. As Rohrer (2005) reminds us, haole is "contingent, performative, and multivalent" (p. 2) – these conflicts

demonstrated that one can ‘act’ local as well. I have struggled with my own claims to Hawai‘i as I continue to negotiate my personal beliefs, values, and assumptions in the shadow of the “historically situated, continuously contested, and partially rule driven” nature of my White settler subjectivities (Reed, 2001, p. 196). The ‘rules’ to which Reed refers proved to be just as complex as identity itself. In a 2009 interview with the Southern Poverty Law Center about racial prejudice in Hawai‘i, Jon Matsuoka, dean of the School of Social Work at the University of Hawai‘i, explains that the Hawaiian spirit of aloha “is pervasive, but you have to earn aloha. You don’t necessarily trust outsiders, because outsiders [historically] come and have taken what you have. It’s an incredibly giving and warm and generous place, but you have to earn it” (Keller, 2009, para. 16). Subjectivities associated with the embedded cultural capital which reflected the dominant discourses of American middle-class ideologies were contested more often in public school educational settings than in the private sphere. Filtered through this lens, attributes of hard-work, aggressiveness, and grit were perceived as arrogance, crudeness, and selfishness by the largely Native-Hawai‘i an, Filipino, and Samoan students who populated my public school classrooms. In order to avoid conflict, I had to learn to perform my role differently. Prior to critical reflection on race and culture, the decision to perform the role of ‘teacher’ differently was spurred by an internalization of what worked in class and what did not, allowing me to hold a perception of my public school students as deficient.

Sometimes, comments or actions of other students/teachers related to my racial identity were purposefully brushed off. However, there were also instances when I became offended and reacted defensively. More often than not, a defensive reaction on my behalf resulted in the escalation of the conflict at hand. These instances affected me personally to the point where reflection upon my positionality and an awareness of perceptions felt necessary. In “Where’s the

Old Nick”, I touched upon the complexity of the temporary nature of my initial employment within Hawai‘i’s public school system and how this led to actions on my behalf to prove my worth to the school administration. I volunteered for unpopular duties, organized school-wide events, partnered with community organizations, and ultimately appeared with my students on the state-wide morning news to promote a program which I was in charge of. Yet the satisfaction of being awarded a permanent teaching line at the end of the school year was diminished by the reaction of a ‘local’ teacher of Native Hawai‘i an ancestry, who berated me in front of a large group of faculty members for my selfish, individualistic behavior. I was deeply embarrassed and genuinely ashamed. In line with the ‘local’ values of humbleness and humility, I decided to adopt a more relaxed approach in the future through which my students would serve as the primary voices and faces of the program instead of me. I embodied this approach in the elite private school context where I worked with another ‘local’ of Native Hawai‘i an ancestry to teach a summer school course. Similar to my public school co-worker, this individual was a middle career teacher who had significantly more experience than I did. To my surprise, this individual chastised me for not doing enough; taking issues with my consistent deferent to him for direction. A glance at his background revealed that in addition to his teaching job at large private school, he was also the product of a private school education during his upbringing. Experiences such as those described led me to gain awareness of the significance of context in terms of what my identity meant to those around me. In order to meet the expectations set for students and of myself, I naturally began to adjust approaches to teaching and learning to better reflect these contexts.

*How do my multiple identities interface with the ethnographic characteristics of the schools
where I have taught?*

Critical reflection has led to insights about the significance of the cultural context of schooling in Hawai‘i. Taken together, these insights reveal the importance of embracing and thoroughly understanding the concept of positionality, which begins with the carried assumption that our understanding of the world and ourselves is socially constructed. In turn, positionality demands that we devote special attention to the differing ways individuals from diverse social backgrounds construct knowledge and make meaning (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1998). Positionality shapes more than teaching and learning; it influences our ways of *knowing* and *doing*. What it means to be ‘White’ differed significantly between the public and private school contexts where I taught in Hawai‘i. My deficit with regards to an awareness of my positionality led to conflict. If an awareness had been attained, I would have been able to understand the subjectivities shaped by the dominant discourses in these settings instead of subconsciously placing value upon those in the private school settings which reflected not only the ‘truths’ of dominant society in Hawai‘i but also those of my cultural upbringing. Since my raciality, as Reed (2001) puts it, “precludes a claim to authentic local lineage” (p. 332), it was my hope that the ‘local’ students in the public school context would draw upon the wider fabric of ‘local’ identity – in this case my identity as a surfer - in order to claim me as a ‘local’. A better understanding of my positionality demonstrates how I held invisible assumptions which had been reinforced within private school settings. These guided actions that reflected a deficit view of my students and of the public school system as a whole, despite my best intentions to serve this population.

How do my personal and professional roles influence my teaching identity?

My experience with emotional abuse, as described in “Color Blind”, demonstrates the process-oriented nature of critical consciousness. Many of the meanings which emerged from

ongoing engagement in this critical praxis have already evolved as I continue to integrate new knowledges into my stories. Gay and Kirkland (2003) explain, “Real life experiences make the learning activities more genuine and authentic, and lessen the likelihood that students will escape the intellectual, emotional, psychological, moral, and pedagogical challenges inherent in reflection and critical consciousness” (p. 186). While the authors’ refer specifically to students in teacher education programs, this knowledge is applicable to practicing teachers as well. I acknowledge that the effect of the knowledge which emerged from this specific experience is uncommon in its significance. However, the consciousness spurred as a result of engaging in the critical praxis which characterizes this dissertation sheds light on the ‘cross pollination’ of the personal, professional, situational, and situated dimensions of my teacher identity in the complicated, shifting context of education today.

What can we learn from my study that can be used to by others in order to become successful teachers in Hawai‘i?

The autoethnographic inquiry serves as a model for authentic critical reflection because of the manner through which it details the sense-making process. The engagement with this model of critical praxis demonstrates a path to self-discovery - it not truly about understanding the ‘Other’. It is about self-discovery; reimagining and reinventing your role based upon a knowledge of your positionality. In this regard, I have generated a model which demonstrates the significance of embracing one’s responsibility to understand his or her positionality as a prerequisite for understanding the ‘Other’. For example, the racialized nature of identity formation in Hawai‘i ultimately negates any effort to remove my haole identity. Engaging in this praxis supported me in illustrating my positionality in this specific identity category. What I can do is take responsibility for this role, understand what it means and where and to whom – and

use that learning to inform how I can perform ‘haole’ better – in a more equitable and just manner. In line with Rohrer (2016), I can use this information to construct a less damaging way of ‘being’ haole in contexts where this role had negative impacts on teaching and learning.

Through this work, I have also contributed a new methodological framework for autoethnographers to utilize to effectively navigate the double-edged sword represented by the growing pluralism of our student population and the depersonalization associated with rigid neoliberal policy discourse. Teachers – especially White teachers of the dominant culture - need to engage in critical consciousness and personal reflection. Gay and Kirkland (2003) note, “This practice should involve concrete situations, guided assistance, and specific contexts and catalysts” (p. 186), further reminding us that it is real life experiences that make the learning activities more genuine and authentic, and subsequently which can lessen the likelihood that the teacher will escape the intellectual, emotional, psychological, moral, and pedagogical challenges inherent in reflection and critical consciousness.

The Structured Vignette Analysis Framework research model presented in this work facilitates the critical self-awareness and offers a promising avenue toward reflexive research of self and ‘Other’ – a critical praxis purposefully crafted to attain the sense of personal agency which one can only authentically understand or comprehend when possessed. Particular kinds of teaching experiences can bring about/spur the development of a critical consciousness in educators, whom in turn utilize learning to guide the development of curriculum and teaching practices. However, this is an aspect of the lives of other teachers over which I have no ability to control. Not every White teacher can be loaded on a plane and taken to Hawai‘i and provided with a teaching job – nor would this provide any guarantee of closing the gap between these teachers and critical consciousness. Through engaging with the critical reflexivity embedded

within this act of autoethnographic praxis, I came to understand the significance of the personal dimension of identity on teacher identity. The Structured Vignette Analysis Framework is aimed at honoring the *process* of becoming aware - seeing what was previously invisible, a potentiality exists for autoethnographers, educators and researchers alike to experience the concrete situations and specific contexts and catalysts in manner similar to my own. Through this model, pre-service and in-service teachers may also receive a form of guided assistance that I did not receive.

Conclusions

As I engaged in the ongoing praxis on critical reflection and action, the research questions guiding my inquiry took on new meaning. Acts of introspection pertaining to conflict that I experienced in Hawai‘i consistently led me back to the examination of my own cultural upbringing. I had previously assumed that I was well-aware of my positionality in Hawai‘i: I did not arrive in Hawai‘i as a neutral actor as evident by the forms of conflict - large and small, direct and indirect - which I experienced living here. Taylor (1999) notes that White Americans’ rarely take the opportunity to “...address the ways in which their culture [has] influenced their beliefs and actions toward others” (p. 242). For White Americans, experiences and identities have served as the model for all “Other” Americans. I had long negated to investigate the complexities of my own identity with any authentic sense of depth because of the unawareness that is born from privilege. The reinforcement of my Whiteness occurred on multiple levels for the duration of my life. Robinson (1999) explains, “...it is rare that a White person has an experience that causes them to assess their attitudes about being a racial being” (p. 88). Six themes emerges from the critical praxis at the heart of this autoethnographic inquiry.

Understanding the Complexities of Identity on Critical Consciousness

The first significant theme, which emerged from this research is that understanding the complexities of identity are a prerequisite for critical consciousness. This finding supports those of Nieto and McDonough (2011), who position critical reflection on ‘self’ as the initial step in their framework for developing critical consciousness in pre-service educators. Only after educators – preservice and experienced alike - grasp how their own cultural frames of reference shape their perceptions can they meaningfully begin to challenge forms of oppression. In this regard, I have located the most transformative knowledge at an intersection where the social, cultural, historical, and political forces that shape teacher identity in Hawai‘i engage with their embedded counterparts from New Jersey; those which I embody. My journey towards wide-awakening began the moment I was able to problematize those values, beliefs, and assumptions which had previously gone disguised as universal truth and/or common sense due to the deeply embodied nature of it. I expand on this below.

Those who are unaware of privilege cannot meaningfully understand oppression. I do not agree with those who argue that ‘haole’ constitutes a racist terminology. An internet keyword search of ‘racism’ ultimately leads to results similar to Merriam-Webster’s (2017), which defines the notion as “a belief that race is the primary determinant of human traits and capacities and that racial differences produce an inherent superiority of a particular race”. Common to most are terms such as ‘prejudice’, ‘discrimination’, and ‘antagonism’. The cannon of critical Whiteness studies fundamentally defines ‘racism’ in terms of systems and institutions within the context of the United States (Lipsitz, 2006). Through adopting this orientation, I acknowledge that our society has built and continues to organize hierarchies of power around a White supremacist value system. Such a system means that White racialized people end up collectively benefiting

from this structural/systemic/institutional arrangement of power, privilege, and resources. In terms of positionality, it is the “Other” who uses this term to describe Whiteness. In this regard, labeling someone a haole cannot constitute racism because of the absence of a connection to systematic privilege and power.

This does not mean it is a pleasant experience by any means – after all, using ‘haole’ in a derogatory manner does reflect the presence of prejudice. However, it is the perception of this irrational attitude of hostility held by the individual who is targeted which determines its impact. As it turned out, the assumptions, values, and beliefs associated with Whiteness – and a lack of recognition of my racial and classed privilege – proved to be the most deeply embedded and challenging to excavate. Consciousness spurred pertaining to the conscious and unconscious defense mechanisms which are actively (and often automatically) leveraged to protect Whiteness reveals that these are surely at play on a regular basis due to the prevalence of the prejudice, operating on multiple levels, which is directed at White people in Hawai‘i.

In sum, there are many reasons why the most recent data on teacher attrition reveals that only 52 percent of the Hawai‘i’s public school teachers are still teaching after five years (Schuler, 2017). Historically, Hawai‘i has turned to the mainland to fill its teacher shortages. Interestingly, transplant teachers are just as apt to list the feelings of isolation that emerge from their positionality as cultural outsiders as they do the high cost of living when discussing the primary hardships of teaching and living in Hawai‘i (Schuler, 2017). Transplant teachers cannot be expected to independently and effectively work with or through experiences designed to unsettle their assumptions, as is the case in this framework. Looking forward, it these teachers should have an opportunity to reflect on both their identities and their privileges. Identity and privilege are related because how we see the world is connect to how we perform our roles

(Grant & Agosto, 2008). As is evident in this study, a teacher's role extends well beyond the classroom and into other dimensions of identity.

Critical Consciousness and Cultural Responsiveness

A second significant theme, which emerged is a distinction between critical consciousness and culturally responsive pedagogy. That is, this study revealed that being critically conscious teacher is a habit of mind, whereas being a culturally responsive teacher is the action resulting from that mindset. In line with the sentiment shared by Yoon et al. (2014), if critical consciousness training becomes an “add-on”, similar to multiculturalism, it is unlikely to be taught in an experiential and meaningful way. An autoethnographic research methodology honors lived experience and allows practitioners to tap into the personal side of identity so often overlooked or ignored. With each act of analysis, I came to “see” dynamics in my data that were hidden beforehand. Yet to recognize (or “re-see”) those dynamics positions the autoethnographer as an expert detective who wants to ‘get it right’ this time around. I see more clearly the importance of continuing to learn about myself, interrogate my own social positions of privilege, and to use that knowledge to inform my research, teaching, and professional practice.

However, so often those “plunges into diversity” focus outwardly on diversity, which leads to teacher candidates not gaining a deep understanding of what it means to be a multicultural teacher and then bringing that understanding into their future classroom (Laughter, 2011). This is the location where storytelling played a key role in my methodology. It's not just about *understanding* - It's also about *internalizing*. In the sentiment of Bordeaux (1986), I argue that although can learn just about anything, it has to feel natural or real to become embodied and natural. The framework I cultivated *demand*s personal knowledge and self-expression in the aid of self exploration in order to make the insights ‘real’. Intersectionality prove to be an

effective framework due to my positionality. It is well documented that White teachers of dominant cultural backgrounds struggle to understand class and race as part of larger culture e.g. to become aware of it. Structured reflection - a tool to improve and refine our work - can serve others well as it did myself. Increased cultural awareness comes through honest, respectful and meaningful interaction designed to empower individuals to learn from and celebrate difference.

Lived Experience Enables Understanding of Cultural Position

This insight leads directly into a third finding, which focused on the substantial role of lived experience in enabling an understanding of my cultural position with regard to such factors as race, ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status, and language, as well as the ways in which these factors can directly shape one's perceptions. It was personal experiences, which ultimately pushed me over the 'edge' and into meaningful, transformative reflection. These personal experiences helped spur the process of breaking down negative assumptions which in turn allowed me to understand the realities of each context rather than the 'mythologies' which are born from dominant discourses. Although each particular lived experience was unique, all were complex and poignant with tensions arising in relation to contradictions I faced when balancing that experience with logic and/or rationality.

In this regard, conscientization was a notably social and emotional process; forged in social settings where connection, support, and encouragement from significant others were crucial facilitators of understanding. One of my dissertation committee members who possessed knowledge of the autoethnographic methodology served in this role – offering connection, support, and encouragement when I was at my lowest point upon being diagnosed with the trauma related condition mentioned in Vignette #4. In his case, this involved the simple act of inviting me to his office, listening to my ideas, sharing books and other literature, offering

suggestions, etc. In Hawai‘i, this is type of interaction - no time limit, no pressure to reach an agreement, no rules at all – is deemed ‘talking story’. An unspoken sense of unconditional acceptance was pivotal. I asked my questions. I constructed a vision. Most importantly, I got started. Once the autoethnographic writer gets going, there is no stopping in the traditional sense.

Critical Consciousness as an Iterative, Ongoing Process

This leads into the next major theme to emerge from this work; critical consciousness was found to be an iterative, ongoing process. This larger theme was born from the discovery that both internal and external factors influenced my engagement with critical consciousness. Critical consciousness, in the form of the oppositional counter-narratives they enabled as presented in this body of work, was not acquired evenly or at once, nor was it deployed evenly over time and contexts. Strong role models and personal experiences with oppression fueled consciousness and activist efforts. Consistent with the findings of Sakamoto & Pitner (2005), who argued that the process of developing critical consciousness can be quite anxiety-provoking as it requires one to abandon existing worldviews, the emotional impact of my increasing and constant awareness of oppression was at times challenging to navigate. However, over time this budding awareness creates the impetus to act upon oppressive systems.

Teaching for Social Justice—Theoretically and Practically

The fifth significant theme to emerge was that teaching for social justice needs to be approached both theoretically and practically, as Freire (1970) insists. This is not new insight; and it is certainly not a groundbreaking finding – but its significance is immense. Through praxis (theory into practice), teachers are able to examine their knowledge, intentions, and practices related to social justice to develop a framework for inquiring into their practices and creating pedagogical approaches. However, as this study demonstrates, creating contexts where praxis is

possible related to teaching for social justice is challenging due to the complicated positionality of educators in our modern era. The consequent loss of goodwill between teachers and their respective schools diminishes teachers' commitment to the tasks of teaching. Today, the need for teachers to be reflexive, or inwardly introspective, is vital to their growth in the profession.

Through my experience engaging with an autoethnographic methodology, I became aware of the multiple identities through which I interpret the social world. In addition, I have attained a consciousness of role that these identities play in foregrounding one dominant, core identity. While I possess multiple identities at all times, naming each of these reveals a hierarchy within which certain identities prevailed over others. As Williams (2014) describes, the “naming” (Freire, 1970) of my multiple identities in this way contributed to their deconstructions into more underlying identities. This process proved to be paramount to understanding the self. In contexts of ongoing educational change, teachers' personal and professional identities need to undergo significant renegotiation and redefinition. This inevitably leads to some degree of personal and professional uncertainty and instability, which ultimately positions teachers at risk of eroding the residue of goodwill that remains between teachers and their employer (Overton, 2006). This is the result of an uncertain positionality which many educators are forced to adopt in light of the ‘balancing act’ which characterizes the metaphorical space between institutional mandates and classroom realities.

Grant and Agosto (2008) highlight the lack of craftsmanship with regards to the theoretical framing of ‘social justice’. Goodlad (2002) contends that ‘social justice’ is a contested and normative concept which theoreticians and policymakers use to mean different things. Terms that include ‘global citizenship’, ‘social responsibility’, ‘moral entrepreneurship’ and ‘personalized learning’ have been embedded within the mission and/or vision statements of the

educational contexts where I have served in New Jersey, California, and Hawai‘i. These concepts represent the respective institutions’ attempt to address the need for social justice. In line with Goodlad’s sentiment, these discourse utilized to justify these terms shared a common, and often conflated, language of equality, equal opportunity and equity. Without elaborating their meanings, putting them in context, or noting the differences between and among these concepts, these actions in the name of social justice are often superficial, ineffective, and uninformed (Grant & Agosto, 2008).

Although the past two decades have witnessed teacher educators increasingly focus attention on how teachers’ knowledge, skills and dispositions relate to social justice, it remains elusive for many educators who brave the stormy waters of the actual teaching profession. Despite the increasing attention in the field of education over the past two decades on how teachers’ knowledge, skills and dispositions relate to social justice, a clear definition still eludes those ‘in the trenches’ – it is something we are supposed to teach *for*. Common to many of conceptualizations are a collective focus on power and the distribution of resources – but whose approach is best; and why? In *A Theory of Justice* (1971), John Rawls (1971) writes that, “Each person possesses an inviolability founded on justice that even the welfare of society as a whole cannot override” (p. 3). To put it another way, the pursuit of a greater social good – the foundational philosophy upon which contemporary federal educational policy rests - should not make us damage the lives of individuals by reducing their basic rights and entitlements. Martha Nussbaum (2001) clarifies, “In particular, Rawls is concerned with the many ways in which attributes that have no moral worth—like class, race, and sex—frequently deform people’s prospects in life (p. 3).

This research was not guided by a preconceived understanding of the concept that is ‘social justice’; in fact, just the opposite is true. This inquiry was guided by my own curiosity about the ways teachers might change their minds while learning to teach. This research was the result of the startling lack of literature pertaining to how individuals outside of teacher education programs – those already in the classroom – can most effectively navigate the challenges of modern education. Over a decade of teaching, I *found* meaning in the concept of social justice. Similar to teacher identity formation in Hawai‘i, teaching for social justice is a complex, fluid and situated process. Understandings of identity and social justice are continuously constructed and reconstructed individually and collectively.

Autoethnography a Tool to Excavate Identity and Action in the Classroom

The final theme is tied to the final research question. This research questions bounds the entire study – as both a process and a product. What can educators take away from this study? What can be leveraged to enhance their pursuit of critical consciousness? Autoethnography as methodology for qualitative inquiry is a relevant tool, which can excavate the nuances and complexities within the embodiment and performance of identity. Rather than treating students’ intersecting identities as a problem to be dealt with, or minimally included by dropping issues into single-day lessons, intersectionality – as the core analytical tool of critical analysis - can be used to reframe educators’ thinking and subsequent actions in the classroom. It most certainly takes skilled and trustworthy instructors to create a safe environment in which students are compelled to explore the construction of racialization, and how in unison with economics, status and power, these constructions have become normalized (Castagno, 2008). Asking teachers to consider issues that are sensitive and potentially contentious to their beliefs, culture and identity,

and how these inform both their own and their students' world views remains a complex endeavor.

The analytical framework utilized in this study provides an effective model for engagement with the critical reflection upon which praxis is built. Critical autoethnography is a reflexive research method that strives toward critical self-consciousness. Critically reflective practice is an important political and educational act because, according to Brookfield (1995):

1. It helps us take informed actions.
2. It helps us develop a rationale for practice.
3. It helps us avoid self-laceration.
4. It grounds us emotionally.
5. It enlivens our classrooms.
6. It increases democratic trust (pp. 22–26).

As a research method, autoethnography allows for the powerful examinations of the relationships between self and other from the perspective of self. From this personal and intellectual space, autoethnography destabilizes the normative conceptualization of knowledge building in qualitative studies; it disrupts the master narratives, which propose universal truths. Doing autoethnography recognizes that different kinds of people share different worldviews and assumptions about the world (Ellis & Bochner, 2006). As such, this methodology is engrained with the potential to raise the critical consciousness of researchers and practitioners alike by engaging them in transformative writing for self and 'Others' in the field; "Others" who are the unfamiliar, the unlikely, and the unexpressed.

Implications

The implications of this study are extensive. For my study, I cultivated a theoretical frame to construct my teacher identity and conveyed how the multiple dimensions of my identity inform my teacher identity. The theoretical perspective mapping that I contributed through the generation of an illustrated theoretical framework offer both the autoethnographer and the reader greater clarity and transparency by demonstrating how the theories in question are linked to the phenomenon of interest. The implication here is that other educators of diverse student populations – from primary school teachers to teacher educators at the university levels - can utilize this theoretical frame (as is or adapted to more accurately reflect their own positionality) to critically reflect on their practices for improvement and identity construction.

The value of this work can be harnessed by teacher educators and researchers alike, whom I encourage to leverage the framework I constructed and utilized here to spur in future educators a critical awareness of their own identities, oppressions, and privileges. This framework can serve as a much needed support structure in the navigation of the contextual realities of contemporary education (e.g. balancing dominant policy discourses with the needs of an increasingly diverse student population). In addition, this work provides theoretical clarity/transparency by illustrating the components of the theories in question and how they are linked to the phenomenon of interest.

I have many ideas pertaining to future directions for autoethnography. Similar to Dr. Christopher Au, whose courage to follow the autoethnographic impulse represents one of the initial efforts to leverage this methodology in Hawai‘i – a context where the perception of someone seemingly drawing attention to themselves contradicts the humbleness that is so highly regarded - I conceptualize my work differently than before as I now transition back into the role

of classroom teacher. That is, it is not about me delivering information, but instead coming together with the adolescents whom with I share the classroom.

Through my autoethnographic work, I performed critical consciousness by engaging with a theoretical framework primarily grounded in the critical-constructivist paradigm of qualitative research. Accordingly, this autoethnographic inquiry displayed two intersecting qualitative research traditions: analytic and subjectivist experiential. However, I also ‘played’ with a third qualitative research tradition in the form of poststructuralism in the effort to produce critical reflexive narratives.

In the future, I plan to explore autoethnographic work that is grounded in Lather’s (2006) paradigm of deconstruct. This represents a poststructuralist perspective and is focused upon how experience functions rather than what it means. Using a variety of poststructural theories, such as the works of Butler (1993), Derrida (1976), Deleuze and Guattari (1987) and Foucault (1980), the few autoethnographers who have explored this paradigm seek difference rather than similarity, absence rather than presence, the local rather than the universal and the fragmented rather than the whole. Critical theory from a poststructuralist approach “...problematizes taken-for-granted knowledge that human subjectivity renders us capable of self-knowledge and self-articulation” (Hughes & Pennington, 2017, p. 40). Butler (2003) describes this work as “making strange” that which we take for granted. To be clear, poststructuralism does not provide a clear set of practices that might be taken up and developed as a method; instead, the poststructuralist paradigm provides a set of complimentary approaches to narrative analysis that serve to spur the production of new thought and in turn, critical reflexivity.

The poststructuralist conceptualization of self is that of a subject constituted in language, within and through discourses that are socially and culturally framed, and that are always in

circulation not only within texts but in the multiple stages and pages of our lives (Gannon, 2012). The subject is considered as an ongoing project— shifting, contradictory, multiple, fragile, fragmented (Foucault, 1997). In contrast to humanist versions of identity (e.g. the constructivist and critical paradigms) which focus on the coherence of an individual rationalist subject— “the subject who knows” (Gannon, 2012) — poststructuralist theory proposes a subjectivity that is not the property of any one of us but that is precarious, always in process and reconstituted anew each time we speak or write within constantly shifting circuits of power and knowledge. In this regard, an intellectual dilemma emerges at the intersection of autoethnography (which starts with the premise that individuals can speak for themselves) and post-structuralism (which problematizes the notion of a singular knowing subject). Of particular interest here is the directions offered by poststructuralist autoethnography (Gannon, 2006; Moneypenny, 2013).

Incorporating a poststructuralist orientation to the ‘doing’ of autoethnography can provide opportunities to experiment with different ways of writing the self, while recognizing that personal narratives can always only be partial and incomplete (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). Foucault (2000) provides a general suggestion about self-writing that correlates strongly with the ethnical orientation of autoethnographic work: “I am an experimenter in the sense that I write in order to change myself and in order not to think the same thing as before” (p. 240). Gannon (2006) explains in further detail:

The purpose of writing is “nothing less than the shaping of the self” [Foucault, 1997a, p. 211] through reflexive and imaginative attention to everyday lived experience and ethical principles for living. Writing the self produces transformation of the self and, potentially, of the world in local and particular contexts. (p. 479)

At the start of a research study, the autoethnographer does not know what new thoughts might become possible or what possibilities for just practice or for ethical subjectivity might emerge. To borrow from Deleuze and Guattari (1987), autoethnographic writing tends to emerge in a “rhizomatic” fashion - taking directions that cannot be predicted or known in advance. A rhizome is the stem of a plant that sends out roots and shoots as it spreads. It is an image used by the authors’ to describe the way that ideas are multiple, interconnected and self-replicating. Similar to critical consciousness, a rhizome has no beginning or end. I argue that writing the self in dialogue with theory, ethics, and culture provides a meaningful shaping of self, or as Deleuze and Guattari put it, a *becoming*. The concept of *becoming* continues the metaphor of a rhizome’s non-linear growth and disrupts familiar understands of linearity:

A line of becoming is not defined by points it connects... on the contrary, it passes *between* points, it comes up through the middle... a line of becoming has neither beginning nor end, departure not arrival, origin nor destination... A line of becoming has only a middle... (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 293; as cited in Kotze, Kulasingham & Crocket, 2016, p. 31)

In writing about my own *becoming*, a focus can be placed upon a dialogue that is always in-process between self, ethnics, professional practice, and culture. Similarly, critical consciousness is conceptualized in a similar manner as a life-long process rather than a destination.

Derrida (1976) argues for a re-situating of the subject that entails moving from the assumption of an essentialized and unified identity that has substance independent of language towards an understanding of the subject as *inscribed* in language, stressing that the subject should be “deconstructed”. The precise strategy of deconstruction that he advocates means more

than just unpacking the assumptions embedded in language or discourse. Rather, it means finding points of contradiction and hierarchies of meaning and pressing at these points and hierarchies until they are at the point of collapse. Butler (1995) explains that “the critique of the subject is not a negation or repudiation of the subject, but, rather, it is a way of interrogating its construction as a pre-given or foundationalist premise” (p. 42). Through this type of autoethnographic writing, I will continue to search for an in-between space of ‘becoming’ in order to further disrupt the boundaries between the binary of self and ‘Other’.

In sum, much of the work of pushing the social justice movement forward in education involves those of the dominant race and culture, who must leverage the privilege that comes with their positionality to disrupt injustice. Civil rights activist DeRay Mckesson - a former school administrator – asserts, “We aren’t born woke, something wakes us up” (Hogan, 2016, para. 6), noting that there are a multitude of ways that people begin to understand the world *better* and *deeper*. Mckesson warns, “The reality is that there are people with wildly varying perspectives on the world, and everybody has the potential to become a storyteller, whether the stories are dangerous, damaging, and bigoted, or whether they’re productive and powerful” (para. 21). It is my hope that this critical autoethnography serves as a springboard for others in the field of education, particularly “transplant” teachers, to begin their own journeys of becoming ‘woke’ – that is, in experiencing their full identities so that they may utilize the resources, access, and skills associated with their positionalities to recognize and subsequently serve those who are oppressed by telling stories that are inclusive and empowering.

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